

this party all subscribe to the idea that commissioners, when they draw boundaries, should consider the needs of constituents. The other day the hon. member for Edmonton West (Mr. Lambert) introduced a private member's bill, which was passed, which called on commissioners to give reasons for their decisions. That was a step in the right direction.

One of the greatest shortcomings of this bill is that it does not lay down guidelines which commissioners must follow. That is a serious omission. I think the government is wrong in thinking it is God's gift to Canadians because I, for one, as well as many others, do not hold that view. The government should remember that we, on my side of the House, also speak for Canadians, that we are interested in this matter and that our advice is worthy of consideration.

When electoral boundaries are drawn consideration should be given to the travelling habits of people, to their social habits, and to what is convenient for them. Canadians should not be treated like cattle, and provinces should not be carved up like a turkey for Thanksgiving. When electoral boundaries are drawn and, for instance, a river is involved, should the commissioners not consider on which side of the river constituents would like to be included, whether there is a convenient way of crossing the river, whether bridges are available, and so on? At present these matters are not considered. Guidelines on such matters should have been incorporated in the bill. Perhaps the committee will consider this matter and propose amendments which will improve the bill.

Some say that we should adopt wholly the principle of representation by population, but in a country as vast as Canada that may not be possible. The requirements of various areas must be considered. I hope the government will listen to the recommendations of members on my side. We, too, speak for Canadians. We wanted to speak on this bill, to make the government conscious that we are dealing with human beings. After all, we are here to represent our people. I wish the government would give us all a better opportunity to serve our people better. After all, Mr. Speaker, this House exists for that purpose.

Mr. Ian Watson (Laprairie): Mr. Speaker—

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I am sure hon. members wish to allow the hon. member who has the floor an opportunity to participate in the debate.

Mr. Watson: Mr. Speaker, I rise to express some serious reservations about this bill. I would prefer to see the bill not go through this afternoon. Actually, I would prefer to see it not passed at all. Members of this House who represent rural areas—I am not in that group—should not be happy with this bill, because it is one that they should not buy. The end result of this legislation, I am convinced, will be that there will be a larger number of seats in the Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver areas, and the rest of the country will take up the balance. If members on the other side of the House feel that somehow this bill will improve representation in rural areas, they are deluding themselves. It will not happen that way.

Electoral Boundaries

There are, in addition, some more fundamental reasons for my opposition. The bill is based on the premise that we in Canada are heading in the direction of an ever increasing population. It is my firmly held belief that Canada should aim at zero population growth.

I also argue that, under the new formula, no advantage will accrue to Quebec. Compare the proposal under the amalgam formula with the system which would exist if this legislation were dropped. What will you find, Mr. Speaker? I suggest that Quebec will bear almost exactly the same relationship to Ontario and the rest of the country under the proposed system as under the existing system.

My argument may or may not persuade members to vote either in favour or against the bill. Nevertheless I sincerely believe that we shall make a mistake if we increase the number of seats in the House, as more seats will make the House more unwieldy and we shall encounter more problems.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Watson: Certainly I think we shall encounter more problems in our ability to handle our own affairs. I do not believe that we need to have 353 members in this House in the year 2000. I urge the House not to vote on this bill this afternoon, because the public of Canada needs to hear more about it.

On Monday, when few members were present, there was general agreement to process the bill through the House. That did not happen, and I am happy. I suggest that we need more time to let the public zero in on this question. Once the public starts zeroing in on it, I suggest members of parliament on all sides will begin reacting in the same way as the public.

[Translation]

Mr. Gérard Laprise (Abitibi): Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a few remarks at this stage of Bill C-36 which concerns electoral boundaries that are about to be changed. As for me, after studying the bill, Mr. Speaker, I feel that the province of Quebec is in process of becoming the least represented province in the House of Commons.

According to the amalgam process, we have lost some ridings in the last few readjustments and are now about to be given one more riding and so, once more, 75 MPs for the province of Quebec. However, if we look at the present trend toward the exodus from parishes or rural areas to the cities, one can readily foresee that this new riding will be absorbed by the city of Montreal which even then will not have enough representation. The rural areas of the province of Quebec will inevitably lose other ridings to the cities of Montreal and Quebec. To my mind, the same phenomenon exists in Ontario especially and will soon be witnessed in British Columbia.

Before many decades we will have a country that will be represented, run and governed by Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver. And that would be to the detriment of rural or semi-rural areas, and I do not think it would be to the advantage of all Canadians.

Under that method even if after 1981 the province of Quebec has four more ridings, when the legislation is