

Government Orders

• (1255)

The Deputy Speaker: Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

The Deputy Speaker: The vote is on the amendment. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the amendment?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Deputy Speaker: All those in favour will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Deputy Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Deputy Speaker: In my opinion the nays have it.

And more than five members having risen:

The Deputy Speaker: Call in the members.

And the division bells having rung:

[English]

The Deputy Speaker: The recorded division on the motion stands deferred until the end of Government Orders on Monday, April 24, 1995 when the bells will be rung for not more than 15 minutes.

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[Translation]

ELECTORAL BOUNDARIES READJUSTMENT ACT, 1995

The House resumed from March 28 consideration of the motion that Bill C-69, an act to provide for the establishment of electoral boundaries commissions and the readjustment of electoral boundaries, be read the third time and passed.

Mrs. Suzanne Tremblay (Rimouski—Témiscouata, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Bill C-69 being debated today deals with the establishment of electoral boundaries commissions and the readjustment of electoral boundaries.

This bill would certainly improve the current situation. For one thing, the provincial commissions will now have to hold hearings before starting their work and will have to produce three maps for every region covered, that is, three redistribution proposals. If there is sufficient public demand, the commissions will have to hold new hearings. We must admit that the process has been improved compared to the current situation.

The bill also requires the commissions to consider certain elements in setting satisfactory electoral boundaries. Clause 19(b) of the bill outlines the criteria to be considered: first, community of interest; second, a manageable geographic size for districts in sparsely populated, rural or northern regions of the province, and; third, the probability that there will be a substantial increase in the population of an electoral district in the province in the next five years.

Finally, clause 19(c) stipulates that the commission shall recommend changes to existing electoral district boundaries only where the factors considered above are sufficiently significant to warrant such a recommendation.

It is interesting to note that the first criterion refers to community of interest. However, another provision of the bill specifies that an electoral district cannot vary by more than 25 per cent from the provincial quota. For example, if the electoral quota for Quebec is 100,000 voters, the commission can establish ridings that have between 75,000 and 125,000 voters.

The commission can agree that there is a community of interest but that the number of voters does not meet standards.

• (1300)

Take, for instance, the riding of Bonaventure—Îles-de-la-Madeleine which is now below the provincial quota but has a vast territory.

The bill does, however, provide that under certain circumstances, the commissions are not obliged to apply the 25-per cent rule. However, these circumstances are so restrictive that one wonders in what cases they would actually apply.

In accordance with subsection 19(3), a commission may depart from the 25 per cent rule if an electoral district or territory is geographically isolated from the rest of the province or is not readily accessible from the rest of the province.

What does geographically isolated mean? Who is going to define this? The provincial commission? The courts? The bill gives no indication. To get back to the case of the Magdalen Islands, they are, of course, geographically isolated. Should the population rule apply? Residents had their own federal electoral district until 1968, and to this day, Quebec law has guaranteed them their own provincial riding. With all due respect for the work being done by the hon. member for Bonaventure—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, we think it would make very good sense for the Magdalen Islands, located in the middle of the ocean, 210 kilometres from the Gaspé coast, to have a member exclusively for the islands.

It will therefore be up to the residents to make a case that the islands are geographically isolated. That should not be difficult. Complying with this initial rule should not be a problem. Subsequently, they will have to show that the population of the islands would justify establishing a new riding. Of course, this