

*Government Orders*

There is one aspect of electoral boundary changes that is a political matter and that is the total number of seats. Canadians have made it abundantly clear that they do not see the need for more members of Parliament. The country's finances are not in a condition to warrant adding the expense of more MPs. Even the physical limitations of this Chamber suggest that it is time to consider placing an upper limit on the number of members in this House. This cap on the House of Commons is the only issue where the Parliament has a legitimate place in considering the issue.

Consideration of the cap on the House is conspicuously absent from any government intentions other than that it has talked about reviewing the numbers of seats with no proposal as to how we can achieve the ends we desire.

We are rather resigned to the fact that we will be blocked by the weight of a heavy-handed Liberal government intent on imposing its will on Parliament without occasion for meaningful debate and honest consideration of amendments.

I believe it is abusing a pillar of democracy, namely the certainty that Canadians will enjoy a fair electoral process free of political gerrymandering and manipulation or even the perception of such and that is no small matter.

Suspending the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act before placing an alternative before Canadians to scrutinize and be endorsed by this House is of great concern to me and to many other Canadians. This is especially so in light of the fact that Elections Canada informed the procedure and House affairs committee that the current act is being administered properly and with no problems.

We have just returned from two weeks in our ridings. I want to state that I heard no public outcry over the proposed electoral boundaries from residents of Saskatchewan, both in my riding and in neighbouring ridings.

Rather, Canadians are worried about the deficit and government waste. They are worried about the dollar and interest rates and an agricultural trade war with the United States. They are worried about failing social safety nets and the hurt being afflicted on them by a government that cannot manage its wallet.

They are worried about the Bloc Québécois, a party committed to breaking up the country at any and great cost and they are also worried that the government is committed to thwarting Quebec separation without regard to fairness and without regard to principle.

The Liberal government may be looking for a red herring to divert as much attention as possible from the economic and national unity issues, the lack of equal treatment under the law for all Canadians and its pillow-soft approach to criminal justice reform.

Perhaps the electoral boundary debates are convenient red herrings as well as an inconvenience for Liberal MPs who could care less about the economy but want to make darn sure the boundary of their riding is at Fourth Street rather than Tenth Street.

The suspension of the act can serve the Liberal government in three ways. First, it could allow Liberals to tamper with the electoral system for partisan advantages. They have majority control in both the House of Commons and the procedure and House affairs committee to which they wish to give the responsibility of drafting new legislation.

• (1020)

Second, as a diversionary tactic to keep attention from its shortfalls it does not want opposition parties, its own backbenchers and the media focusing on the economy and the issues that are important to Canadians.

Third, it attempts to deny the public input and judgment of the public in the current process.

There are flaws in Bill C-18 such as the suspension time. One amendment that we have put forward is that the time of suspension be reduced from 24 months to 12 months.

The current boundaries are based on the 1981 census. We may end up delaying boundary readjustment until after the next election which will happen in 1997 or 1998 if all goes as we expect. That means it is possible that not one election may be based on the 1991 population statistics if the following election were to occur say in the year 2003. It could be based then on the 2001 decennial census. This in fact may be unconstitutional. In any case it certainly breaks the spirit of the law.

A second flaw in Bill C-18 is that it will waste \$5 million because most of the work of the commissioners that is already in place will become unsalvageable.

Could the Reform Party have supported Bill C-18? Possibly. If the Liberal government had categorically stated that it would cap the seats in the House of Commons at a number not greater than the current 295 seats, perhaps that would have been justification for suspending the current process.

Does the government really have a plan to reform the parliamentary system so sparsely populated regions of Canada will receive a fair shake in the electoral process and in decision making? We have a blueprint for that plan and we would be happy to discuss it at any time in this House.

Third, the government has not reassured us that there will be no allowances for patronage and gerrymandering in a new process to replace the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act by agreeing to substantive support from all three recognized parties in the House before enacting a replacement act. We discussed such issues in good faith but the results were not forthcoming.