

referred. Anyway, the committee already has considered it. I hope they will not go back on their decision, and the bill will come back to us as amended and be passed. The sooner the better, for in many parishes, at least in my area, people are wondering whether they will stay within a constituency or fall under the jurisdiction of another one, and that accounts for a lack of interest in the population. It becomes harder to communicate with them. Our task is made more difficult. There are municipalities, for instance, where, because a local initiative program met with a refusal, people are mistakenly led to believe that they will be transferred to another constituency and that their member of Parliament will no longer pay any attention to them. These are very delicate matters which we must examine in order to prevent an upsurge of hostile feelings towards honourable members, and avoid parish split-ups. Those were the few remarks I wanted to make with respect to the bill under study.

● (1640)

[English]

Mr. Arnold Malone (Battle River): Madam Speaker, it gives me real pleasure to enter the debate on Bill C-270, a bill which I believe to be long overdue, seeking, as it does, to remedy obvious shortcomings in existing legislation.

If we consider the British North America Act in perspective of the terms of the constitution that relate to representation by population, it is doubtful whether the fathers of confederation would ever have accepted that proposition under present day conditions, or if only they had known how Canada would have developed.

At the time of confederation, 95 per cent of all Canadians lived in the rural areas. However, according to the Lithwick Report, by the year 2,000 the situation will be reversed and 95 per cent of all Canadians will be living in five major cities—virtually the entire population will be crowded into only five urban areas. Obviously, this creates new problems in terms of deciding how people would be best represented. During the decades of the 'sixties and 'seventies, 250,000 people have left the rural parts of the prairie provinces of Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba, and it was forecast that during the 'seventies the rate of emigration from rural communities will be even higher.

The problem has already been well outlined. The question before us now is really one of the semantic meaning of the phrase "representation by population". I maintain you cannot simply concentrate on the word "population". It involves consideration of the circumstances in which people can, in fact, be represented. The truth of the matter is that one cannot represent people if one cannot be within the proximity of people. It is essential that if one is to represent others should be able to have contact with them. If there is too great a distance between one group of people and another, the task becomes almost impossible.

At one time, I thought my own constituency was a large one; after coming to Ottawa I realized that it was not nearly as large as some of those represented by other hon. members. Nevertheless, I understand the inconveniences of having to travel a couple of hundred miles to interview people in connection with various matters throughout the length and breadth of a rural constituency. We should realize, too, that regardless of the size of his constituency a

member is increasingly responsible to keep in touch with his constituents on, essentially, every issue which comes before parliament.

Though my constituency is largely rural, I nevertheless have to concern myself about veterans affairs, questions dealing with industrial plants, questions dealing with natural resources and so on. Like the hon. member for Pembina (Mr. Elzinga) I would urge, therefore, that we do not simply focus on population but that we should recognize that there is a tremendous need to increase the size of the research staff available to a member of parliament.

Representing people means that a member must be able to see his constituents and be visible to them. To serve them is a different matter: that involves the provision of the necessary staff. We should take a look at what is being done in the United States where Congressmen are given an allowance of \$140,000. While this may appear an excessive amount at first glance, the fact is that if one is to deal efficiently with all the issues and representations which come before a member of parliament, there must be an increase in staff. I am one who thinks it is extremely important to consider all these aspects which relate to representation. From this point of view, sufficient staff should be provided to members to enable them to handle all their duties with the necessary expertise.

Obviously, something needs to be done when we recall that the City of Toronto elects more members to parliament than the whole of the Province of Alberta, or that the cities of Toronto and Montreal combined send more members to parliament than all three prairie provinces. Population should not be the only factor to engage our attention when we consider the words "representation by population". Certainly I have every sympathy with the hon. member for Northwest Territories (Mr. Firth) whose constituency makes up about one third of the total area of Canada—that is his territory which he calls his constituency. It is impossible to cover that area adequately.

Anyone who has carried out any studies in the field of communications or in the field of sociology well knows there is a limit to the size of a group when it comes to making sound decisions, and though there may be a temptation to concentrate on the notion of population when establishing a criterion for fixing the number of members of parliament, it would be very easy for this institution to be too cumbersome to engage in a worthwhile decision-making process.

We are already considering a number of related matters. It behooves us at this same time to set a limit on the extent to which this chamber should grow, thus dispensing with the notion that the number of members should grow in relation to an increase in population. A relatively small group of people, well staffed and provided with adequate research facilities, can do far better work than a larger number without these advantages. Presently members are forced to plough wide and shallow, handicapped in their efforts to debate legislation adequately and criticize issues as they come before the House.

In conclusion let me say again that the real issue here is the issue of representation by population. The term "population" is not, I submit, the only word upon which we should concentrate our thinking. The question is whether