

The bill before us is an example. For example, there is argument between members about arithmetic. There is argument about the meaning of the clauses. These differences arise partly because opposition members on the back benches do not have access to adequate resources of expertise and information.

● (2120)

Very definitely one of the things we need is to keep the House as small as possible, or in fact smaller than it is. I would have the political courage to stand up and suggest that we divide the riding in my area, making the riding smaller, and I will fight for one of those seats. At least let us consider the suggestion.

I will vote against this bill as I do not believe it is in the interest of Canada to expand the size of the House of Commons. It is my opinion also that this bill has not been conceived in faulty and weak philosophical premise, not in the interests of Canada. It is also an attempt at regionalism that British Columbia is named as a middle-sized province, and is little more than an effort to thwart the obvious rights of British Columbia in respect of equitable representation.

Representation by population concepts once again are discriminatory against British Columbia, in particular, relative to the smaller provinces. It is not in the interests of Canada to expand the size of this House, and I have grave concerns and reservations that we have started in the wrong way. We should be forgetting municipal and provincial boundaries and looking instead toward the regions of Canada. If we were to assure equitable regional representation in a smaller House, the House of Commons of Canada would be more efficient and effective in accomplishing the democratic processes necessary to carrying this country forward.

Mr. John M. Reid (Parliamentary Secretary to President of Privy Council): Mr. Speaker, there has been comment to the effect that there has not been much time to debate this particular subject. Let me remind hon. members that when the subject of redistribution became a factor in the public eye it was debated quite hotly as to whether the mechanisms then existing were appropriate to the provision of the kind of representation in Canada we wanted. This reached culmination when the government brought in, with by-partisan support, the bill to disband the operations of the Electoral Boundaries Redistribution Act. This was done because members from all sides of the House felt the existing system was not competent.

When that bill went through the House there was discussion about the kind of redistribution system people would like to see. There was discussion in the committee about that and then the government came back with five proposals which were laid before the House, briefly debated and referred to the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections.

In that committee a proposal was put forward by the hon. member for Dauphin (Mr. Ritchie), known as the Ritchie proposal. This amounted to an increase of three seats for Ontario and three for B.C. This was in addition to the five proposals which the government put forward.

Electoral Boundaries

The committee very quickly came to the realization that the two proposals which had the most merit from its point of view was the Ritchie proposal and the amalgam method. The committee did not complete its work, although I believe it was on the verge of making a decision between these two proposals when the election intervened. After the election there were consultations between the leaders of the parties and it was decided that, because the committee had almost come to a decision between these two, it was not necessary to refer the matter back to the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, that instead the government should bring down the bill based on the amalgam method.

An hon. Member: It is not true.

Mr. Reid: I want to repeat that this was negotiated with the various parties, that it was clearly understood that this is what should happen, and that it was being done on the basis of the very widespread public debate which had preceded that decision. It may well be that many members feel they have not had much of an opportunity to participate in the debate before. I can only say that there has been plenty of opportunity, and that is the only comment one can make about it.

An hon. Member: When and where?

Mr. Reid: I have discussed already, in answer to the hon. member for Calgary Centre (Mr. Andre), the procedures we went through, the opportunity there was for public participation, and the opportunities there were for people to present other alternatives to the committee. In point of fact, when we were at the committee stage there was only one proposal put forward, other than what the government proposed, and that was the Ritchie proposal.

An hon. Member: We only had two meetings.

Mr. Reid: The Ritchie proposal had sufficient merit that members of the committee were prepared to consider it and the amalgam method. Had other members come forward with other suggestions and other mechanisms, I am sure there would have been a longer debate in the committee. But they did not.

An hon. Member: Nonsense.

Mr. Reid: The hon. member says "nonsense". I am describing what happened. Whether hon. members agree with what happened is not for me to say. What I am describing is the process that took place, the decision that was taken as a result of the debate that went on in the House between the parties, all of which led to the decision to proceed with this bill. As I say, all the parties were fully informed. Whether your caucus was informed is something I cannot say. I can say that we had a full discussion about it, and I am sure the same thing happened in other parties.

Reference was made by the hon. member for Calgary Centre (Mr. Andre) to the Abbott Commission. It was established because of the report brought down in this House in 1970, I believe, called the Beaupre Report. The Beaupre Report was to the effect that the duties of members of parliament were expanding and therefore some-