

Government Orders

• (1230)

Even the Senate was aghast at this kind of variance. That means some ridings will have fewer people represented than other ridings, up to 25 per cent. If there were twice as many people in one riding as another, every voter in that riding would have twice the democratic clout as people in the next riding which only had half that number of members. Here we have it almost as bad. It can be 25 per cent more members.

The basic principle of democracy is representation by population, a basic tenet of democracy.

I ask for unanimous consent to delete Standing Orders 56 and 78.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Maheu): Question and comments.

Mrs. Ablonczy: Madam Speaker, I do not believe you were listening to what I said.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Maheu): I do not think it is necessary to accuse the Chair. I was being consulted on another issue.

Mrs. Ablonczy: I am very sorry, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Maheu): Would you please repeat what you said.

Mrs. Ablonczy: I asked for unanimous consent to delete Standing Orders 56 and 78.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Maheu): Is there unanimous consent?

Some hon. members: No.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Maheu): Resuming debate.

Mrs. Ablonczy: The third reason this bill is not a good bill and why we oppose it is the appointments on the commissions that redraw the boundaries are now not being made accountable to Parliament. Commissions are appointed in each province to draw up new boundaries as population shifts happen in each of the provinces. This is a very good process, one which has pretty well stopped the old and odious practice of gerrymandering, a problem in the past in a number of countries. This was even in the 1800s a difficulty in our democracy.

In the 1960s the electoral boundaries redistribution commission was set up. It is independent of government so that the self-interested fingers of politicians cannot be making decisions about how the boundaries of our ridings and constituencies are put together. Since that time the political interference in the process has been pretty well looked after.

The appointments to these commissions are made by the Speaker of the House. They can be challenged by members of Parliament if it is felt those appointments are not objective, if they include people who lack independence from government. That is a healthy check and balance.

There is a real difficulty in ensuring the process is fair and objective and that it is seen to be fair and objective. We want to keep that accountability to Parliament. We have every respect for the Speaker of the House of Commons but there needs to be a certainty the appointments can be scrutinized and challenged if necessary. We would like the process to be totally above board and accountable to Parliament. There is a move in the bill to diminish and remove that accountability, which is the third reason we oppose it.

The fourth reason Canadians should be concerned about the bill is that if it goes forward the whole process of redrawing boundaries will have to start all over again. Canadians will not know what riding they are in until six months before the election. Many Canadians who are becoming more involved in the democratic process will have to get ready for an election and nominate representatives they feel will do the job properly in the next election, and they will be guessing. How are constituency associations supposed to nominate candidates for an election when they will not even know the area from which they might be drawing voters? They will be trying to sell memberships and get people involved in the democratic process but the people will not know what street or what avenue the candidate will represent.

• (1235)

Mr. Silye: Madam Speaker, on a point of order, there does not appear to be a quorum in the House.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Maheu): I do not see a quorum in the House. Call in the members.

And the bells having rung and the count having been taken:

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Maheu): There is a quorum.

Mrs. Ablonczy: Madam Speaker, it is an honour to see so many members opposite coming in to listen to the words of wisdom I am adding to the debate.

We now have a bill before us which is very badly flawed, which does not serve the interests of Canadians appropriately for four reasons. It increases and will continue to increase the number of members in every Parliament. It allows a very wide variance in the number of voters in each riding, thereby violating the basic democratic principle of representation by population since some voters will have greater weight than others depending on how many voters are in the riding.

The appointments of the commissions which will draw up the boundaries of our ridings will have an important check and balance to their objectivity removed. There will be real uncertainty, unnecessary disruptive uncertainty, because new boundaries would not be finalized until a few weeks before an election would take place, very much interfering with the ability of Canadians to participate properly and freely and effectively in the democratic process.