

● (1600)

The hon. member for Témiscamingue said there were ridings in the cities which were merely agglomerations of apartment blocks, and so on. That is true. In other areas, ridings are measured in collections of townships, collections of small cities and towns. The problems which arise are different. We ought, in this period of 18 months, to consider not just the factors which go toward providing for representation for groups of people; we ought to consider during that time the ways in which a member of parliament can best serve the public, the kind of assistance with which he should be provided, whether different standards should apply in different parts of the country, what special assistance should be given to members from the far north with respect to transportation, and so on.

In the past, these things have been considered on an ad hoc basis when they have been considered at all. We now have an opportunity, I suggest, to deal in depth with the sociological and other factors which go to making a member of parliament functionally representative of his constituents in terms of the particular problems of his riding. For these reasons, I fear I must differ from my hon. friend from Peel South whom I hold in great respect. I find myself caught in this debate between the hammer and the anvil, between the large urban areas and the rural areas. I should like all these considerations to be studied. It is important that the House should not attempt to compress into too short a period the type of consideration which the electoral process deserves.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. member for Fraser Valley East (Mr. Patterson).

An hon. Member: Filibuster.

Mr. Alex Patterson (Fraser Valley East): Mr. Speaker, the observation from across the way was totally unnecessary. He suggested this was a filibuster. I do not know whether he was referring to me. I may express my views a little more often than the hon. member does—I have not heard him say anything yet—but I believe we have a responsibility to represent those who have sent us here, and despite the fact that the hon. gentleman objects I intend to assume that responsibility this afternoon.

As every hon. member is aware, the question of redistribution is of vital concern not only to those who sit in this chamber but also to the people of Canada. It is very gratifying to be elected to sit here in the House of Commons, but it is even more gratifying to feel one is provided with the means of adequately fulfilling the responsibility which has been imposed. It seems to me that every possible facility should be available to members to assist them in fulfilling their tasks. The task which has been entrusted to us is an extremely onerous one, though I realize that this opinion is not shared by everyone. I remember that shortly after I was first elected in 1953, I received an anonymous letter from a lady suggesting it was too bad I had left the profession in which I had been engaged, in order to become a member of parliament because, she said, members of parliament just sat around and did nothing. I assure hon. members I was not here very long before I realized just how wrong that lady was.

Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Suspension

There are two aspects of our task here. The first is to pursue and conscientiously discharge the duties which are ours in the House of Commons. The second is to maintain liaison with our constituents so that we may be aware of their views and their aspirations and represent them in parliament. In recent years, at least, we are finding that the demands of the House are making it increasingly difficult for us to maintain this necessary contact. A proliferation of problems is currently being brought to the attention of parliament. There are issues which were formerly matters of provincial concern only but which have now moved into the realm of shared responsibility. New approaches have to be developed in response to changes in a highly organized society, and all these demands have added to the workload of members.

Here we are, at this late date, still in Ottawa at a time when common sense and necessity insist we should be meeting with our people and sharing in their activities. We are a part of community life. I am aware that an expression of opinion such as this leaves one open to a charge of longing to get away to spend a leisurely summer. However, those who take this attitude are not only out of touch with reality but are unaware of the responsibilities of a member and the wishes of those who work hard planning community projects and who appreciate a member showing an interest by his presence and support at those functions.

I believe the failure of the government to properly organize the business of the House and concentrate on priority items has resulted in the situation we face today. Perhaps this answers the question raised by my hon. friend from York-Simcoe (Mr. Stevens) when he asked why this question of redistribution had not been dealt with earlier.

As I have indicated, the second aspect of our responsibility is to maintain close liaison with those we represent. The question has been raised whether a member should simply speak for himself, form his own conclusions, reach decisions without regard to the views of his constituents and then leave his fate in the hands of the electors at the next election. If this were true, the necessity for knowing what our people are thinking would not be so great. I believe these two positions should not be mutually exclusive, but should blend together. A member's own decisions, views and conclusions should blend with the views and wishes of his constituents. At least there should be a proper balance and blending of the two in order that the important issues we face may be taken care of more adequately.

● (1610)

The members of this House have become the ombudsmen of the people and, despite all our representations, the federal government has not seen fit to introduce a measure or to support one that would provide an ombudsman. We know that such persons have been appointed in several provincial jurisdictions. I was interested to learn that the Solicitor General (Mr. Allmand) recommended the appointment of an ombudsman for those who are incarcerated. Significantly, those who run afoul of the law and must pay the penalty for breaking the law are to be given the services of an ombudsman, but law-abiding citizens who run into problems are not entitled to the services of