

Government Orders

guy. I could use the job. Maybe I do not want the job that long, but I could use it for a few more years. Why do we not just forget about having elections, save money and suspend the electoral process? These are very peculiar reasons.

Let us look at the history of this matter. The intent is very clear in the way the debate has proceeded. The bill was introduced at first reading and had only been on the Order Paper for a couple of days when we proceeded to second reading. At second reading the government was not prepared to put up many speakers. The benches over there emptied. The wind whistled through and the tumbleweeds blew through. There was really nothing to say on this legislation. We put up some speakers to provide debate on the issue, as did the New Democratic Party. Immediately, after one day of debate, it was labelled as a filibuster. As a consequence closure was brought in for the first time in this Parliament.

What is happening now is that the government decries—and the Bloc Québécois speaker this morning decried it—that in the meantime they are having public hearings, that the commission has not listened, that Elections Canada has not listened, that they are proceeding with public hearings and that they have to be stopped.

This illustrates precisely why we have this kind of process. Politicians are not supposed to be in charge of it. Elections Canada is an independent agency. The law is on the books. All of that is fairly transparent.

Let me quote no other expert than the hon. member for York South—Weston. In the *Globe and Mail* of March 25 the following statement on which I will elaborate at third reading appeared: "It is hard to see what was done here as anything other than self-interested politics, said renegade Liberal MP John Nunziata of Toronto. It makes no sense other than for self-preservation and MPs' convenience".

That is a frank statement. We all know there is no public outcry over this matter. There is a public hearing process for people who want to discuss it, but there is no demand out there that we stifle the process of redistribution and start it all over again.

The government is bringing in a related motion saying that we should study the process. That is perfectly valid. I said before that we were studying just about everything Parliament is supposed to be doing; we are studying rather than acting. We could study the process of electoral boundary readjustment. That would be valid. If we are to do that I would suggest we really should be doing it for the next time. Now that this process is under way and has already been suspended once before I do not think there is any way we could get ourselves involved in it without the fairly obvious charges of gerrymandering and the

other things we are beginning to read about in the newspapers. That is how we should be handling the particular issue.

• (1110)

On the number of seats we repeat once again our offer to the government. When processes have been suspended or changed in the past it has been because there has been an alteration to the amending formula. If there really is concern about costs and the number of MPs we would be prepared to support an amendment to that effect. It would provide a reason to suspend the process the public would support. In the absence of that there is no reason given.

Let me just conclude by making one last statement. I noted very carefully the remarks of my friend from the Bloc Québécois who talked about Quebec's need for one quarter of the seats in the House of Commons. I have wondered what was behind the Official Opposition being involved in a government desire to change the rules of the electoral game. I hope it is not another back door Meech Lake or Charlottetown. That particular provision is not helpful.

As the hon. member for Kamloops indicated the real loser is British Columbia. The real opposition to the particular direction of setting up a quarter of the seats was by British Columbia. It would require a constitutional amendment. I hope there is no way we will come up with a back door formula through this process that will produce that kind of effect. I look forward to saying more at third reading.

[Translation]

Mr. Paul Crête (Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup): Mr. Speaker, when I spoke in the first debate on this bill, we accepted the two-year delay. The Reform Party's arguments against this delay were not considered valid, but we understood that they were fundamentally opposed to it.

However, today we are faced with an in-between position which I think is the worst of the worst. This amendment would have the consultation go on so long that I think it is totally inefficient. I think that over the Easter break, when we were in our ridings more, the people clearly told us that they had other concerns besides redrawing the electoral map. People in Quebec and Canada now want someone to really fight unemployment; they do not want to be satisfied with crumbs like the infrastructure program.

As for the deficit, people were so amazed by the decisions of this government which, after crying wolf for months, brought forth a mouse. When we tell them that we will debate whether the reform of the electoral map should proceed right away, in two years or be amended after twelve months, they think that we are not doing the work we are paid to do. I think that the Reform Party is contradicting itself on some other essential aspects of its program.