

*Government Orders*

The bill will find opposition among three different groups of people. It will find opposition among people who believe in real representation by population. It will find opposition among people who feel that we are already over-governed to a great degree. It will find opposition among people who disapprove of the idea of granting power to unelected and unaccountable bodies like a boundaries commission.

• (1610)

First, let me talk about representation by population in the context of the reform of the whole parliamentary system. Reformers believe in the idea of absolute representation by population. In other words, to the greatest degree possible constituencies should have the same population.

However, as a counterpoise to that, to balance the idea of constituencies which perhaps would congregate in heavily populated areas, we have to have a triple-E Senate. It should have an equal number of senators from each province; it should be an elected Senate and it should be an effective Senate. It is something that our party has been fighting for since its inception in 1987.

We are proud of the fact that we are the only party that has ever elected a senator. The late Stan Waters was elected in the Senate election of 1991 in Alberta and was subsequently appointed to the other place. That could have been a very valuable way to start the trend toward a triple-E Senate.

That system would probably give some regions, such as Alberta and Saskatchewan, as my hon. friend from The Battlefords—Meadow Lake has just talked about, and other regions of the country some representation and protection from the tyranny of the majority that we have found when we have a pure representation by population system in a country that is as geographically large as Canada.

Reformers believe in the idea of representation by population because it underscores a commitment to the idea of equality before the law. It is a very important concept which, to some degree, has been forgotten in the past several years. It has been superseded by a different type of equality which governments have come to believe in, that is, the equality of outcome. All Canadians want is equality of opportunity, and they would find that, to a large degree, in a system that had absolute representation by population, along with a triple-E Senate. It is a very pragmatic concept, a concept familiar to countries which have large geographical areas, such as the United States and Australia.

It is a pragmatic idea because it prevents countries which are big and sparsely populated in some areas from falling apart. In a country as large as Canada, we have very disparate points of view and divergent interests. Sometimes, certainly under a pure representation by population system, those ideas that we find in

different areas of the country would not be adequately addressed in a House of Commons, for instance. We need a counterpoise to that and that is why Reformers are big supporters of a triple-E Senate.

Bill C-69 gives us neither of those concepts; certainly not representation by population and definitely not any kind of change that would give us a triple-E Senate. In fact, it offends the principles that underlie both of them.

One of the things that Reformers find hard to deal with is the 25 per cent variance regulation in Bill C-69. It means that constituencies can vary in size by 25 per cent from the mean. That could lead to discrepancies of as much as 67 per cent in population size between constituencies. That is a huge difference in population size. It permanently dispels the idea that we can have equal influence for our votes in a Canadian system.

That may be a quaint notion to a lot of people in this place, but I would argue that people back home very firmly believe in the idea that each vote should carry the same weight. We would argue strongly that the government has to begin to move that way. That is why the Reform Party has suggested, at least, to amend the variance to 15 per cent between constituencies. If we did that, it would mean that, at most, we would have a variance of 35 per cent in populations between constituencies. That is not perfect, but it certainly brings us closer to the idea of representation by population until such time as we can have constitutional reform that can address some of the real problems that affect the Canadian parliamentary system.

• (1615)

As I mentioned a minute ago, I think people feel we are already over governed. I remind members of an article in that ubiquitous journal that sits on just about everybody's night stand, *Readers Digest*. About a year ago there was an article about how much money is spent on governing Canadians, how much it costs to run Parliament. When I think of that article I cannot help but think of our unelected Senate and the people over there who sadly do not enjoy the confidence of Canadians, and how at times they have not displayed the type of conduct we would like to see from all parliamentarians. I specifically think of the GST debate.

It is necessary to make those people accountable. If we had a triple-E senate it is entirely possible that we could trim the size. Reform has called at various times for Senate reform that could possibly leave us with six senators from each province. Some people have suggested we only need two from each province. We look to the American example and we can see they can get by with two senators from states as large as California, which has a population almost as large as Canada's. Somehow they manage to make that system work. One thing that could be done is trim the number of senators.