

Electoral Boundaries

Mr. Peter Elzinga (Pembina): Mr. Speaker, I shall speak briefly on Bill C-370. It seems that two members on my side want to do the same thing but cannot agree on how to do it. Sometimes it is not easy to resolve disputes concerning the boundaries of certain constituencies. I believe passage of this bill will make any commission heed the 25 per cent tolerance provision in the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act.

The population of Pembina constituency is varied. We have fur trappers in one area and highly urbanized people in another. Therefore it is important that the provision regarding the 25 per cent tolerance should be implemented in my riding and other ridings of Canada. Which is easier, travelling from 109th to 125th Street in an urban constituency, or travelling 100 miles to another town in an adjacent rural constituency?

● (1630)

Basically, we are not continuing with the re-allotment or re-drawing of these boundaries in a proper perspective. We say representation by population, but we must recognize there are two points in that statement, representation and population. The people throughout Canada must be represented properly. It is much easier to represent an urban constituency which is more populated than a rural constituency with less population, because of the travelling expenses and various other aspects.

Just prior to Christmas we passed the re-adjustment act of 1974 which increased the size of this House. There again we took the wrong view as to what we should do in representing the people of Canada. Although we increased the size of this House, we did not increase the representation. It would be much easier to accommodate the people of Canada if the services to the individual member were improved instead of increasing the size of the House. A member is here to serve both as a legislator and as an ombudsman, to his constituents.

The facilities which a member has to serve his constituents must be improved if he is to do a good job for the individuals he is here to serve. I feel very strongly about this. Over the past number of years the workload of the individual member has increased immensely. We receive a good many more requests because we are much more available than members of previous years. That is partly because of our own doing and partly because of some of the adjustments made to the services available to a member. When I speak of available services, I do not want that to be misinterpreted. Too often mailing privileges and free telephones are referred to as privileges of a member when, in reality, they are services to the constituents. They give the constituents a more effective voice in Ottawa.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Adrien Lambert (Bellechasse): Madam Speaker, I merely wish to make a few comments on Bill C-370 which concerns the eastern part of the province, and more specifically the area I represent.

I feel that, in the past, when electoral boundaries were readjusted, one very important factor was not given enough consideration in the setting of a riding's limits, especially in the case of rural ridings.

[Mr. Brisco.]

It is generally recognized that over the last few years, rural ridings have been losing electors to urban ridings. Consequently, the factor should not be changed, nor should consideration be denied a 25 per cent difference, so that rural populations might be given better representation, and their members of parliament might represent ridings of reasonable size geographically. In view of the fact that rural ridings have a dwindling population, if they were to have a population corresponding to that of urban ridings, a member would have miles and miles to cover.

Hon. members representing these areas will be faced with working conditions which are completely inhuman. Here is an example: I think it affects all hon. members representing rural ridings, irrespective of their political affiliation. The conditions are the same for all. Distances and ridings remain the same, no matter which party is holding the seat.

Madam Speaker, there are times when the elected member of a rural constituency must visit three different communities the very same night. This occurs very often. For instance, let me tell you that I was working last week in my office in an area of my riding. A number of hon. members have acquired this habit. Instead of having his constituents drive many many miles to see him, the elected member will go to his constituency to give them the opportunity to see him.

The following week, the member goes to another area of his constituency. Last week, I was working in my office in another part of my riding. In the evening, I was supposed to attend three meetings, and because roads in rural ridings are not highways, we had to drive very slow. This results in a considerable waste of time. If we are compelled to cover more mileage than we are covering today, people will no longer be at the meeting when we get there, although we cover the whole distance.

It is necessary to take into account the fact that, as far as the human aspect is concerned, and whether the community is large or small, there are people, families living there. They have the same rights as anybody else. When they invite their member of Parliament for any occasion, it is the duty of the member of Parliament to attend.

As far as I am concerned, I try to give equal attention to all communities, whether populous or not, because I take into consideration the factor and the principles I have just outlined.

So, in the circumstances, since the bill is very important and the matter of redistribution has been settled, we shall have to act in the future. I think the bill should first be seriously examined, then passed, because by the same token we shall amend the act. We shall thereby authorize the commissions to heed a decision of Parliament and make it possible to guarantee rural areas sufficient representation in the House of Commons. We shall certainly have the advantage of geographically more balanced electoral districts and therefore, members for those ridings will not have to work in abnormal conditions.

We are willing to work and please people, but no legislation should impose positively impossible things on members of parliament. I therefore heartily commend this bill. If it has to be referred back to a committee, let it be