

Government Orders

To combine RCMs into ridings is reasonable to a point but not if the cities themselves see no benefit in it. For instance, by being shifted from Richelieu to Lotbinière, Bécancour was being moved into the same riding as the other municipality in the Bécancour RCM but was being separated from Nicolet.

In an article published on Thursday, February 24, 1994, in *Le Nouvelliste*, Mr. Jean-Guy Dubois, Mayor of Bécancour, said, and I quote: "It is quite obvious that this exercise by the commission members was essentially a demographic one, and that they did not take into account the sense of belonging in these communities".

And Mayor Dubois added that the Bécancour-Nicolet area cannot be divided. And what about the city of Victoriaville—Arthabaska, the heart of the Bois-Francs area, which was being separated from several area municipalities such as Princeville with which it had real and tangible links.

I can only congratulate the government on its decision to impose a two-year moratorium on this electoral boundaries readjustment process. We are talking about an \$8 million exercise. Eight million dollars to move little lines around on the electoral map, displeasing the majority of national, provincial and municipal authorities in the process, all the while trying to preserve electoral quotas and in fact spending public funds needlessly.

Of course a revision of the electoral boundaries is necessary when certain elements of the Elections Act are not adhered to.

Factors to be taken into account, besides electoral quota, are described clearly in section 15 of the Act: community of interests of the inhabitants of a given electoral district in the province or its historical development. Also, care must be taken to ensure districts are not too large in sparsely populated, rural or northern regions of the province.

• (1345)

Recent revisions have shown that more often than not, commissions had used purely mathematical rules to readjust electoral boundaries.

The intent, in this bill, to preserve the integrity of RCMs within districts is commendable but hardly immutable. As we have seen, in certain cases, other factors must be taken into account.

In a commentary published on Tuesday February 22, 1994, in *L'Union*, the chairman of the CNTU Bois-Francs, Mr. Denis Champagne, gave a general idea of what people think: "For an electoral map to be good, it must reflect the various communities and identify the connections between these well enough. Finally, the administrative structure has to adhere to it. Right now, we are in an undescrivable administrative muddle". And

he adds: "Boundaries now divide RCMs; they overlap different administrative areas. . . In a word, I cannot see the current revision meeting our needs in that respect".

That is what commissions must look at. It stands to reason that we should review the legislation governing this process. A parliamentary committee should oversee the review of the Act and electoral boundaries should be readjusted. It really needs to be done. It has not been done in 30 years.

Sir John A. Macdonald himself recognized that electoral power parity was essential, while not being the only factor to be taken into account to ensure effective representation. He introduced the Representation Act, 1872, in recognition of this basic truth: "Although the rule concerning the population of each district has been widely obeyed, other factors have been considered relevant to ensure a variety of interests, classes and communities can be represented and the rule of numbers is not the only one used".

This quote was used as part of a ruling made by the Supreme Court of Canada on June 6, 1991, in the case of the Attorney General of Saskatchewan against Roger Carter et al.

It would therefore be worthwhile to review the Act to make sure that electoral boundaries commissions take all these factors into consideration rather than set arbitrary boundaries.

[English]

Mr. George Proud (Hillsborough): Madam Speaker, I rise today to participate in a debate that has gone on for some time now about the right or wrong of suspending the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act. As one who comes from the smallest province in Canada whose seats have been enshrined in the Constitution and where the numbers can neither go up nor down, people might ask me: "Why would you want to participate in this debate?"

I believe what we are proposing to do here is very worthwhile at this time. We have decided to suspend the act and have the committee look at what way we can change the distribution system to make it better. As my colleague from Vancouver Quadra alluded, I believe personally the change should be in line with the way it is done in the United States.

At this time we are all talking about slowing down the spending of money and other things. The talk going around indicates that we have already spent \$5 million but it is going to cost a lot more money if we look at the outcome of the redistribution.

• (1350)

I am not necessarily saying that we should not redistribute the numbers or redistribute the seats, but I do not believe at this time in our history there is any justifiable need to add more seats any place in Canada.