

Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Suspension

Mr. Caouette (Témiscamingue): It certainly is. Now it is said that the number of federal members must be limited to 264. Mr. Speaker, not long ago in Quebec there were 92 provincial members; I think that they now number 114 or 118. They did not hesitate to establish new ridings. In Ottawa we will offer fewer services to our constituents on the pretext that the figure 264 is sacred. Nothing is that sacred. Let us put a new figure in its place through a new law which will allow us to increase the number of ridings in the provinces where it is needed without any decrease elsewhere in Canada.

In studying this bill, we should take our time this afternoon, but we should not discourse endlessly on that matter: we should state clearly our positions and accept to study that matter anew before the January 1, 1975. That will do no harm either to the Progressive Conservatives, the Créditistes, the New Democrats or the Liberals; but that will allow us to go on to something else in order to enjoy holidays like everybody else.

● (1550)

[English]

Mr. Walter Baker (Grenville-Carleton): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to the hon. member for Témiscamingue (Mr. Caouette) who spoke with such eloquence. He asked that the upholding of the principle of redistribution await the 18-month period. He typifies the position of the rural member of parliament who has the obvious difficulty of travelling great distances. Before coming to this House I followed the career of the hon. member for Témiscamingue in the newspapers. I read about his sleeping in the back of his Chrysler and doing a number of other things because of the large area he has to cover. I understand he has some connection with the Chrysler product.

I listened to the speech of the hon. member for York East (Mr. Arrol) and the speech of the mover of the amendment. They represent another extreme in Canada, the extreme of the congested area. I have some experience in both these settings in my constituency. People in both rural and urban areas have their peculiar problems of communication with their member of parliament no matter on what side of the House he may sit. I think the point is well taken. I experience the difficulties of a rural area in one part of my constituency. In the northern part of my constituency I have the problems of an area that is congested and becoming more congested. The communication problem is growing.

Generally speaking, I support the first principle, that of representation by population. If there is to be a delay, I would support as another first principle that the House get on with the matter of redistribution by the time suggested in the amendment. I have not been in this House very long, but long enough to know that in the period suggested by the hon. member for Peel South (Mr. Blenkarn) this House will not be able to deal with the many problems that face both rural and urban areas. I would like to have it otherwise. I would like to be able to say with sureness that all these questions can be answered within the short period of time suggested by the hon. member for Peel South. However, I do not believe that is possible because of the workload of members of parliament in their con-

[Mr. Caouette (Témiscamingue).]

stituencies, in the House of Commons and in our committees. I think it would be improper, from the point of view of the input there must be in connection with this consideration. This would not be possible if we limited ourselves to 11 or 12 months. We may be doing an injustice to the fundamental problem of this House and this parliament, namely, its representation, if we so limit the period for full consideration of this question. I do not believe any member of this House, or any person in Canada would want something so fundamental to be compressed into a short period of 11 months.

I again read the speech of the hon. member for Peel South in which he set forth the problems. He referred to the Alberta problem and the New Brunswick problem. In dealing with the new New Brunswick problem he mentioned the sociological factor. Without being disrespectful to the representation commission, which at least did a good job of dividing my province in terms of the number of people involved, there has been overlooked—even in the province of Ontario—the sociological and traditional aspects.

The sociological factors which the hon. member for Peel South related to New Brunswick relate as well to Ontario and other parts of Canada. They are great problems and cannot be solved by members of parliament talking among themselves. They cannot be solved in party caucuses or in this House. They require input from community groups across the country, from people interested in appearing before a committee of this House to discuss these problems. Problems in the rural areas, such as dwindling incomes, high costs, and weather put pressure on a member of parliament. These people also feel alienated. As the hon. member for York East said, there is alienation in Canada. That alienation is not confined to the cities but exists in the rural areas as well.

The hon. member for Témiscamingue referred to sociological and geographical effects being considered. We would be doing a disservice to this country if we considered them in what for all practical purposes is a very compressed period. I am not suggesting there ought not to be legitimate political input into redistribution; there is nothing wrong with that. However, the input into redistribution ought to go beyond representations before a commission. Representations from the public ought to be made to a committee of this House. Members of parliament who are not members of that committee may also want to attend.

There should be no time limit placed on the work of the committee which would result in a half measure. We must give this very important aspect of the representative life of this country the most complete and most reasoned consideration. As much as I would like to see it done in the relatively short period of 11 months because of the first principles I mentioned earlier, I do not believe it can be done within that time. I believe we would be doing this House and the people of this country a disservice. We would be denying them the right to come before members of this House, assembled in committee, to present their arguments on the sociological, geographical and democratic aspects of redistribution. It is with some reluctance that I say what I do with regard to this bill, because I understand the feelings of my colleague for Peel South.