

Government Orders

regional representation they would need if they were to lose seats in the House if we did cap the seats and keep this House from being expanded. The government has absolutely no plan.

If we cannot justify this bill what would we do? Why are we debating this bill? The reasons are few but they are not very good. MPs are not happy with the boundaries. To me that is not a good enough reason to suspend an act. MPs are not happy with the personalities. I have heard reference to some of the commissions and the commissioners saying that one commissioner in New Brunswick had complained about the process and the people he was involved with and working with. That is not a good enough reason to suspend the whole process.

I have heard some complaints even about Elections Canada which have acted properly within the mandate provided it. Again this justification for suspending the act is not a reasonable one at all.

I have heard of MPs saying they do not want to permit the public hearings. They think that is a waste of money. I would think it reflects very badly upon a government if it is not prepared to allow the public to have input into this process before it decides to change the whole process. This has already been delayed once and now we are talking about a second delay. The current boundaries are based on the 1981 census. We may be into the next century, in fact the next millennium before we redraw the boundaries.

• (1250)

There is also a danger that if we suspend this act it may give the opportunity for MPs to be involved or to try to influence the formation of the new commissions with patronage like the old days, patronage in the commissions, perhaps even patronage appointments at Elections Canada.

I would like to read a letter that was addressed to the Prime Minister regarding Bill C-18 from the Brampton Board of Trade. It says:

Dear Mr. Prime Minister:

The Brampton Board of Trade felt that your government had turned the pages on the old style of governing and opened the process to inclusive government by asking for input from the Canadian people.

Therefore, we are quite concerned that the Hon. Herb Gray would introduce a bill in the House to suspend the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment process for 24 months. At this point in time the commission struck last September is now at the stage of public hearings. Further, the commission has already spent \$5 million of the budgeted \$8 million for this study and continues to prepare for the public hearings in April and May.

The board feels it is not appropriate nor necessary for a review committee to step in at this time and shut down the public process.

If Bill C-18 is passed we ask what are the additional costs to the taxpayers? We already know what the current commission has cost.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Szabo) I regret that the member's time has expired.

Mr. Scott (Skeena): Madam Speaker, on a point of order. It appears by my count that we do not have a quorum present.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Maheu): Call in the members.

And the count having been taken:

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Maheu): I now see a quorum.

Mr. Ted McWhinney (Vancouver Quadra): Madam Speaker, this debate has been prefaced by individual hon. members referring to their own situations. I should perhaps indicate that I won my own riding with what was the largest majority for a Liberal candidate in British Columbia and, second, we have examined the basis of the proposed electoral changes and our inquiries confirm that while my constituency seat is divided in two I would have a comfortable majority in one part and a very large majority in the other.

This having been said, I would say that having knocked on 10,000 doors in the process of seeking a nomination and then winning an election, I have formed a tie of intimacy with my fellow Canadians in the riding and I would be very sorry to lose it.

However, let me get on to the substance of this debate. I speak with experience as a former electoral commissioner for British Columbia. The then Speaker of the House, Madam Sauvé, telephoned me and said that Parliament was very anxious to put the commissions on a non-partisan basis and would I serve for what was by the way a very nominal remuneration and I served.

I do have some comments from my experience there. The first very obvious thing for these electoral commissions is an absence of continuity and therefore of shared experience which is the basis of any law-making in the commissions. It is the habit to replace each commission with a change of government. I would say that when there was a change of government my own commission was summarily replaced and the successor commission made no attempt to contact us or to find out if we had any shared experience we would want to pass on.

The second thing that struck me was an absence of co-ordination between one commission and another. That is to say, in British Columbia we were unaware of what the commission in Alberta was doing or what its philosophy was if it had a philosophy. I think this goes back to one of the interesting aspects of the present system.

• (1255)

Everybody fulfils their mandate honestly and with all due skills that they bring to the task, but there is an absence of overall direction partly because the federal electoral commissioner, as a civil servant, under the act in which he is established construes his role narrowly so as not to get into policy issues