

Mr. Speaker, I ask again the minister and all party leaders to put politics aside, use their common sense and, I should add, take up the challenge today, so that we may prove to the Canadian people that, even if there are four parties in the House, we can act sincerely and humanely and recognize the needs of all regions and, moreover, in spite of all the mistakes which have been made, that we can still correct at least most of them. Finally, I hope that in the future this Electoral Boundaries Commission will be made up of members of parliament, if you please, Mr. Speaker. I want us take our responsibilities.

● (1710)

**Mr. Gérard Laprise (Abitibi):** Mr. Speaker, as I am quite concerned by the discussion now going on about Bill C-60, although this bill does not meet the purpose of this discussion in the true sense of the word, I want to speak for a moment or two to give my opinion on Bill C-60.

I listened to the speeches of most members, and I heard the hon. member for York-Scarborough (Mr. Stanbury) say that members do not represent regions or territories, but people. Mr. Speaker, I agree on that. But if we consider how the population moved in a number of years in Canada, we realize that in a few years, the rural area will be underrepresented in the Canadian Parliament.

I read recently a report saying that in the year 2000, Canada will have a population of about 30 million inhabitants, of which 20 million will live in about 15 cities. That means that 10 million people, that is only one third, will live in rural or semi-rural areas. But, the way things are shaping, it is quite obvious that people living in rural areas are going to be under-represented in the House of Commons. I think Parliament should take steps to protect these rural people who are taxpayers and deserve to be represented at the same level as anybody else in Canada.

When we look at the difference between people living in areas such as Montreal, Quebec City, Toronto or Vancouver, and people living in rural areas, there is no possible comparison. In urban areas, they all enjoy administrative services. They only have to go around the corner and they come face to face with federal as well as provincial and municipal administrative agencies, whereas in rural districts, people have to travel miles and miles to be provided with the same services. Let us consider, for instance, the situation which prevails in Matagami, a mining town in the northern section of my constituency. When people have to go to the UIC office, they must go to Val-d'or. And that is over 200 miles away. So those people are disadvantaged compared to urban residents when they want to go and discuss their problems with executive officers of the federal government.

As for Canada manpower centres, it is again about the same thing, 115 miles from Matagami to Amos to go to a manpower office. No comparison is possible with urban residents. The riding I now represent, Abitibi, is the second largest riding in Canada. The largest is the riding of the Northwest Territories, and the second largest is Abitibi, which is larger than the

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Yukon, larger than the four Maritime provinces combined, larger than France as well as many other European countries besides France: that is how large is Abitibi. Between Noranda North and Sugluk, there is a distance of 985 miles. Of course, we cannot get there by car, there is no road suitable for motor vehicles to go up there. We have to go by plane: you know when you go there but you never know when you come back.

My colleague for Villeneuve (Mr. Caouette) said before that he once was stranded there for two days before he could come back, and this has been my personal experience at Grande Baleine, when I had to wait until the temperature got somewhat better so I could come back. However, Mr. Speaker, distances are a factor in rural ridings; I mentioned mine but there are many others which, while not quite so large and so spread out are still nevertheless huge ridings. This should be taken into account and the residents of those rural ridings have the same right as urban dwellers. I insist that such circumstances must be taken into account. And when the commissioner travelled through these regions to get the opinion of these people, when the study for electoral redistribution was carried out, I wonder if these trips were made seriously or if they were only a face saving device, because proposals made by such organizations as CERDAT in northwestern Quebec and by the Union of County Councils, had been highly spoken of, but in any event their recommendations have not been taken into account, it all sounded beautiful but nothing positive came out of it.

Then, Mr. Speaker, we were all led to wonder what they were trying to get at with this. What CERDAT was indeed asking for was representation for three ridings in northwestern Quebec. The present situation, Mr. Speaker, is that Bill C-60 recommends that we maintain those 12 ridings which already existed in northwestern Ontario. My colleague for Villeneuve (M. Caouette) tabled a bill to maintain the three ridings in northwestern Quebec, and I think that to be fair minded, the minister who introduced Bill C-60 should agree to grant the same privilege to northern Quebec so that it gets the same representation it had before the last redistribution.

Mr. Speaker, if one cannot but agree that the present representation was calculated according to the average population shown from the 1971 census, it is a fact that within the Abitibi riding things have changed since. There has been the James Bay hydroelectric development and there must be at least an extra 6,000 persons who now live in that area, either as residents or as workers. It is likely that they do not want to take this fact into account now, but in 1981 they will probably say that they are going to add a riding in northwestern Quebec because the population increased. And by 1981 they will realize that the construction will end within the decade. Then chances are we will come back in 1991 and scratch that riding from northwestern Quebec because the population will have decreased and we will play this way with representation of an area. Mr. Speaker, other members made representations, not only Social Credit members in this House, but members from other parties, urging the minister to reconsider his bill and