

Government Orders

• (1530)

In Ontario the last distribution map stayed within the plus or minus 25 per cent limit. However, the difference between Algoma and Scarborough North, the smallest and largest populations, is 42 per cent.

One of the reasons the Liberals squashed those redistribution maps is they said the maps were unfair to the north. In other words, there already was an inequity of 42 per cent between the most populous riding and the least populous riding in the province of Ontario with the maps brought forth last year. However, that is not enough. They want a greater discrepancy than that. Forty-two per cent is not acceptable to either the large rural ridings of the north or to the urban ridings, particularly those close to Toronto.

Now the Liberals want to put these ridings into the schedule. They want the difference to be greater; they want more than a 42 per cent variance in the province of Ontario. That is not good representation for the voters of Ontario and certainly is not good for all Canadians.

Mr. Speaker, I am not sure how you are going to be ruling on the Bloc amendment so I will not be able to speak to it at this time. I hope I will be able to because there are some democratic principles in place.

I hope the Liberals will come to their senses and support these amendments. For the betterment of the country, let us finally see them do the right thing, the thing they argued in committee was right but what they then backed away from and voted against, only to bring in an inferior bill.

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Speaker: Since there is no speaker on the government side, I give the floor to the member for Bellechasse.

Mr. François Langlois (Bellechasse, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I listened very carefully to the comments by the member for Kindersley—Lloydminster. I was very surprised to hear him say that the hon. member for Cochrane—Superior, who made a first rate presentation before the procedure and House affairs committee, had ulterior motives. He defended not only the interests of his riding, but a global vision of rural Canada, which has been slowly emptied of its population and has had to have its boundaries redrawn.

It is with great pleasure that I acknowledge the presentation made by the member for Cochrane—Superior to the procedure and House affairs committee, which revealed, among other things, how difficult it was to work with a schedule, and showed that it would probably be better to include a clause in the bill dealing with the special circumstances resulting from geographical isolation. I will come back to these points in a moment.

The hon. member for Kindersley—Lloydminster seems to believe that the history of Canada started on October 26, 1993, the day he was elected to this House. Since the beginning of Confederation, we have had nine constitutions, including the 1982 Constitution. If the member had looked at the British North America Act, he would have found that the first schedule to this act deals with the electoral districts of Ontario. The 82 electoral districts are listed in there, and what do we find?

That, in 1867, the founding fathers had decided that electoral boundaries would essentially be determined by county. Therefore, in 1867, counties became the basis for representation throughout Eastern Canada, which included Ontario, Quebec, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia. People's sense of belonging started with their county. Suffice it to list the constituent counties of 1867. I will name the first nine only. They are the counties of Prescott, Glengarry, Stormont, Dundas, Russell, Carleton, Prince Edward, Halton and Essex. The list goes on, because there are 82 of them. When a county had to be divided, because the population was too large, it was indicated. However, the territorial division, and people's sense of belonging found expression in the county, as clearly established in the British North America Act.

• (1535)

The riding I now represent, Bellechasse, comprises four counties: Dorchester, Bellechasse, Montmagny and L'Islet. In the past, it was represented by four members in this House—one for each county. Nobody threw stones or threatened to blow things up because representation varied from one riding to another.

It was in 1964, when we began to no longer use the county as the basis for representation in the House of Commons, that we upset the whole system. Now people, wherever they live in Canada, have a hard time identifying with their electoral ridings, which have changed, naturally, because of significant shifts in population.

We believe in the principle of representation by population, to start with, but in a tempered form, which must reflect the history of Canada and the fact it started out as a rural country and remained so for a very long time. People drifted toward the cities, but their first loyalties had been to the rural areas in each of the provinces of Canada—in the Atlantic, in Quebec, in Ontario or in the western provinces.

Today, of course, there are fewer people in the rural ridings and an adjustment must be made. However, does it have to be to the third decimal point to avoid there being any variation between provinces or between ridings? Should we work towards the 15 per cent proposed by the hon. member for Kindersley—Lloydminster, or should we stick to the traditional way of doing things in this country, a tolerant and open-minded electoral system which for the fact that the number of voters in a riding which is made up of 50 or 60 different communities is per force much lower, while at the same time allowing for the boundaries