

*Government Orders*

voted for a House that grows to 301, the status quo formula for continued growth.

Their personal support for capping the House continued. As late as November 1 the member for Scarborough—Rouge River said in committee: “We should be addressing the size of the House in our report. I do not think as a committee we have nailed that one down yet”. He added at a later meeting of the committee on November 22: “It would be naive to leave this issue without discussing the size of the House”.

It was at this point that the chair, speaking for the government, indicated that it would be better to leave the problem of a growing House to some future Parliament. This comment seemed to concern the Liberal members who thought that capping or reducing was a good idea.

The member for Mississauga West who also participated in our deliberations wondered why the next Parliament should be asked to investigate the problem: “Is there any good reason why we cannot do it?”

The answer to that is a very loud and resounding no, there is no good reason the bill could not have contained provisions to cap or reduce the size of the House of Commons, other than a lack of political will on the part of the government to deal with a controversial issue that would be acceding to the wishes of Canadians.

• (1645)

Her comments that day were reinforced by her colleague from Vancouver Quadra when he agreed with her that the work on the problem of size should start now. All of these comments are in the committee transcripts.

There was a very real level of non-partisan agreement that capping and reducing the House was in order. The Liberal members of the committee wanted it and the Reform members of the committee wanted it. My friend from Mississauga West was absolutely right when she said: “I think the Canadian public wants us to limit the size of the House”. It seems that the only people who do not want it are those in the government inner circle who really call the shots.

It is always interesting to hear what any given government member thinks about a particular issue and then compare their response after a caucus meeting or after the whip has had a chance to talk to them. Time after time we see them mysteriously changing their minds about what is in the public interest.

I noted with interest that the hon. member for Bellechasse was surprised that the Liberals had changed their minds. I do not understand that. Liberals have been changing their minds ever since this country was established in 1867. There is nothing they

stand for and there is everything they stand for; it is whatever is convenient at the time.

It is time that the House and the government acted on principle, on what is right and on what is in the best interests of the Canadian public. It should consult with the Canadian public rather than flim-flamming around from one position to another, depending on the whims of the inner circle of the Liberal Party.

There seemed to be a pretty clear consensus among Liberals that capping and reducing the size of the House was a good idea. Why then was the issue suddenly and strangely dropped from the committee report, the bill which the government introduced, and all subsequent comments from those Liberal members? Suddenly, it was not an issue any more.

The answer is quite clear. They were whipped into line by the party brass. The red book promises of giving ordinary members of Parliament more autonomy and control over committee and House business is demonstrably dead. It is one more example that the red book promises of open government and restoring integrity were nothing more than tricks designed to win support from a public weary of unethical politicians. How else can the Liberals explain the practice of standing firm on an opinion one day and then voting it down on the next?

It was the same with the back to work legislation which the House dealt with last week. Many government members spoke in favour of designing legislation that would prevent costly strikes which damage the economy. Then they voted against the bill introduced by the hon. member for Lethbridge which would have done just that. Then within 24 hours the same members stood in support of the bill legislating an end to the crippling rail strike. It just does not make sense. It is pure partisan politics at its worst.

It is exactly the kind of top-down decision making Canadians from coast to coast are sick of. It is the Charlottetown accord approach to making decisions. They are trying to impose their will on Canadians. The Liberals are demonstrating that they hold a very low opinion of the thoughts of their own backbenchers. They expect them to act like trained seals, to always toe the party line and to vote when and how they are told to.

We saw exactly the same thing when we were discussing the allowable variance from the provincial population quotient, which is also a part of Bill C-69. Several government members expressed support for the idea of making constituencies, as close as possible, equal in population.

The member for Mississauga West went so far as to vote in favour of a Reform suggestion to move to a 15 per cent variance in population quotient. In our committee meeting on October 20 she admitted: “I voted with you on that, if you recall, and got into big trouble”. Big trouble for expressing her own opinion in a committee meeting of this House. The member admitted that