

Government Orders

to see a government reject a change based on the principle of a better redistribution of ridings on the basis of population.

The proposed reform, after several years of extensive debate and reflection, to allow the representation in the House of Commons to be directly related to the population of a riding, while also taking into account the sense of belonging to a region, while taking into account, for instance, the principle of the regional county municipalities in Quebec, the principle also of the economic relations that can be established in various regions—of course that will and desire of the House and all Quebecers and Canadians was extremely valid. However, basically, if we really wanted a reform, would we start with that kind of redistribution? We would probably start by asking ourselves what our institutions represent and how useful they are.

• (1235)

Based on that, the first reform would be to ask if we have one House too many. Do we Quebecers and Canadians still need two Houses? One is commonly called the Senate but in the parliamentary language of the House of Commons we call it "the other House". Do we still need that other House? That would be the first point to consider.

Then we will talk about the distribution and number of ridings, how many people should be represented by a member of Parliament and so on. Ultimately, many Quebecers and, I am sure, many Canadians want the other House to be abolished.

By attacking the other House, I do not want to attack the venerable people who sit there; we know that there are some very competent individuals. Of course, there are also some bagmen for the big parties such as Mr. Rizzuto for the Liberals and Mr. Nolin for the Conservative Party. They were appointed to their position and they are well-paid party workers who raise funds for the old parties.

But except for these few cases, let us admit that there are some really capable people who should run for election to this House to make their contribution instead of going to that big dormitory, which sometimes becomes a nursery school, as we saw in some debates. But of what use is that big dormitory to which those hon. sleepyheads go? That is the real question.

If we talked about reform by first dealing with the usefulness of the other House, we would realize that the members of that body have knowledge and skills which would be much more useful to the community in this House here. In fact, that other House is a sort of relic of colonialism, meant to protect the interests of the wealthy and to cool the ardour of the people's representatives. That is why one of the requirements to sit in the other House was to have property worth at least \$15,000. That requirement still exists, although it is meaningless today, but back then it was a lot. Therefore it was a House to protect the

wealthy from some legislation that could have threatened their wealth or economic power.

Over time, the situation evolved. That other House became the defender of the regions. That is why we often heard about the importance of the second Chamber in western Canada, for example, because that House in a sense embodied the regions. Historically, that House had a certain role to play as a defender of the regions; that was acceptable too.

But now, people band together in associations, unions, environmental groups and all kinds of organizations. They have means to make their demands heard and associations to represent them directly to elected officials and they no longer feel a need to have that House to defend them. That House has become so useless that the time has come for us to think about whether it should even exist. Those associations no longer go through the other place. In fact, I wonder how many could answer if I were to ask all the hon. members here the name of the senator representing them in their regions. In my region of Sorel for example, what is the name of our senator? I am involved in politics myself, yet I do not know. If I, as a politician, do not know who my senator is, you can imagine that he must not be getting much mail or too many calls. There are even senators who refuse to give out their fax numbers. I found that out when some of my constituents said: "Maybe we could stop that unemployment insurance bill from going through in the Senate; give us the fax number." So, I phoned around and, as it turned out, almost half of the senators I phoned refused to give out their fax numbers; they did not want to be disturbed. It is incredible, but true.

• (1240)

My point is that the upper house has lost its *raison d'être*, and that may be where reform should start. Let us start by reviewing the need for our institutions. Based on that review, we will be able to say: "The other place no longer meets our needs; it must be abolished." That would mean \$40 million, \$60 million or \$70 million less to collect from the taxpayers. Furthermore, the senators' expertise could be put to good use elsewhere. They are obviously committed to politics if they agreed to sit in the other place. So, we are telling them: "Get elected democratically and come and sit with us in the House of Commons. Find a seat. Get the people's seal of approval."

This leads to the next question. Are there enough members in this House or too many? As far as I am concerned, the answer rests in the comparison between Canada and other democratic nations, preferably North American democratic nations.

Let us take the United States as an example. They have a legislative body, the members of which are not called members of Parliament, but congressmen. If I recall correctly, there are some 450 of them representing 250 million people, while we are 295 for a population of 25 million. If the United States were to have as many congressmen as we have members of Parliament in Canada, they would need 2,950 seats in the Congress. Their