

*Government Orders*

• (1700)

I say to the hon. member that in the province of Saskatchewan, while there are many things the provincial government has done which I disagree with, one of the things it has done that I do agree with is that it has reduced the number of provincial seats from 66 to 58. If the current provincial government in Saskatchewan gets re-elected, one of the reasons it may win re-election is the fact that it has reduced the number of seats in the province. This is contrary to the wisdom of Liberal members in this House who seem to think we need to expand the number of seats in this place to please Canadians and to serve them better.

With respect to the amendment proposed by the Bloc, the Liberals agreed with the Reform Party on most of the proposals which were put forward, including this one. On the others, the Liberals backed away from these principles. The Bloc pursued a very interesting strategy in that it supported the government even though it disagreed with the government on this issue all the way through the progress and development of this bill.

It seemed rather odd that the Bloc would stand with the government. Liberal and Reform members did not agree at any point that Quebec should be guaranteed 25 per cent of the seats in the House. I am not too sure why, but all of a sudden the Bloc decided that this had become a major issue and it would have to reverse its position on the bill.

Let us take a look at what would happen if we followed the Bloc proposal. The Bloc want to guarantee that Quebec will have 25 per cent of the seats in the House of Commons regardless of population. It claims this is Quebec's historical proportion of seats. The Bloc may be proposing this because it knows it will lose the referendum and it wants to remain in the House.

In any case, it violates the principle of representation by population. Seats are added to provinces to account for population growth and proportional shifts. If all the provinces insisted on retaining their proportion of seats, a provincial redistribution would simply not occur. That would create even greater discrepancies in the population of provincial constituencies as the country continued to grow. I would like to give a couple of examples of this. I hope the Bloc members are paying attention.

In 1925 Saskatchewan had 21 out of 245 seats in this House. If Saskatchewan demanded to have its historical proportion of seats, it would now receive 26 seats out of 301 in the next redistribution. That is almost double the current total of 14 seats.

Who would give up those seats? Certainly, Quebec could not because that would not guarantee its 25 per cent. I guess those seats would have to come from the province of Ontario. Or perhaps the province of British Columbia would give up a few. I am sure all of us would have to give a bit to make Saskatchewan and Quebec happy if they were guaranteed their historical percentage of seats. Saskatchewan would have to have 26 seats

and Quebec would have to have 25 per cent of the total. It would be a big problem.

Let us look at an even more interesting scenario. The province of Nova Scotia at one time had 21 out of 213 seats in this House. That was at about the turn of the century. A few years later, Alberta and British Columbia received their representation and they only had seven members in this House. If we locked things in in that scenario, Nova Scotia would now have 30 seats in this House and Alberta and British Columbia would probably still be under 10 seats, even though their populations far surpass the province of Nova Scotia. What would we do about that?

Seats are allocated on the basis of population shifts relative to the population of the entire country. It has to be that way because Canada is a nation which has always grown at different rates at different stages and times in its history. The government must adapt and pass laws to fit the reality of the day, not the reality of a century ago. We cannot always navel gaze into the future to predict exactly what is going to happen.

Fixing seat allocations at an arbitrary moment in time is folly. No one can know how the country will develop in the next century. We must not create something which future generations cannot live with and cannot change which, in fact, would be reason to continue some of the divisive arguments we have heard in the past between different regions and provinces within the country.

As Quebec currently has one of the slowest growing populations in Canada according to Elections Canada projections, in order for Quebec to retain 25 per cent of the seats in the House of Commons other provinces would have to surrender them. Otherwise more seats would constantly have to be added to the House of Commons and given to the province of Quebec. The House would become enormous in no time if we followed that practice.

• (1705)

The current formula predicts a House with 318 members by the year 2016 AD, with 75 seats going to Quebec. If Quebec were to have a guaranteed 25 per cent of the seats, other provinces would have to surrender five seats. If the other provinces were not prepared to surrender five seats, then six seats would have to be added to the province of Quebec to bring it up to the 25 per cent mark. As time went on, the number of extra seats required in an already growing House would increase.

This is clearly anti-democratic. It is typical of members of a party and a movement in Canada that cannot even agree on a question regarding the future of this country and whether or not Quebec will remain in Canada. They want to make sure the question will be carried in their favour. They cannot agree on the referendum question and the timing for that question because they want to guarantee the answer will be the one they want. Therefore, they will design the question to fit the scenario. Certainly this is anti-democratic, just as it is anti-democratic