

*Government Orders*

for actions from this Parliament that never materialize, for instance responsibility transfers that do not come with the required funds.

There is no doubt that we are now at a crossroad. The decision will be made. I am convinced that with the debate to be held in the coming months, a majority of Quebecers will say no to these fruitless battles we have been involved in for too long.

[English]

**Mr. Len Taylor (The Battlefords—Meadow Lake, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to Bill C-69, an act to provide for the establishment of electoral boundaries commissions and the readjustment of electoral boundaries, at third and final reading today.

I am pleased to have this opportunity because, although I am opposed to the way the Liberal government has handled the issue, the debate which has taken place around the issue of electoral boundary readjustment has produced some very good suggestions for change. This debate today gives me a chance to comment in more detail than I did earlier this year when I spoke on the concurrence motion that was presented before the House.

Bill C-69 was first tabled in the House of Commons on February 16, 1995. It has been dealt with in committee and is now back in the House for third reading. Bill C-69 repeals the existing Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act which has been in place since 1964.

In early 1994 the commissions established under the 1964 rules and appointed in more recent years began issuing their proposals for the new electoral boundaries, which they had been working on for months previous. The proposals generated considerable concern and debate, especially since the federal election had just been held and concluded.

• (1545)

In March 1994 the government introduced Bill C-18 to suspend the operation of the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act. As originally drafted, Bill C-18 would have abolished the 11 electoral boundaries commissions and suspended the act itself for up to two years. Because of concern that this would unduly delay redistribution—and the Liberal majority in the House of Commons refused to acknowledge this—the other place proposed amendments to suspend the act only until June 22, 1995 unless new legislation was put in place before then and rather than abolish the committees to suspend them until that time.

The bill in front of us today is meant to address those matters. The government is doing what it can to ensure it has full passage before June 22. At the outset, let me say that I will be opposing the bill when the vote occurs at the conclusion of the debate. I will do this because I believe the government is interfering with

the independence of what should be a completely non-partisan arm's length relationship between the people of Canada and its politicians.

There is a place for politicians to debate process and procedure and to set rules that will apply in the future. However, in this case the independent process had begun its course and was acting according to its existing mandate when the government unilaterally shut it down and began setting new rules that would be applied retroactively.

With the passage of this bill the new rules will be in place and the work of the many existing boundary commissions, much of it completed after numerous public hearings were held, will be put on the shelf to gather dust. I expect such will be the case of the Saskatchewan Boundaries Commission which for all intents and purposes has completed the work of readjusting the federal boundaries within my province. Because of the provisions of this bill, that commission will likely not be reappointed and Saskatchewan residents will vote within the same boundaries that were originally set for the 1988 general election when the next general election is called.

Political constituency boundaries are like provincial and national boundaries. Despite the fact they are often arbitrarily drawn, they help to recognize economic, social and geographic patterns. They are most easily accepted by the public when they recognize those patterns.

We in Canada have developed a system that is based on a reference to population and changes in these constituency boundaries take place when populations shift. I realize that in a system of representation by population this is an important consideration. I agree with those who, inside and outside this Chamber, argue that it makes no sense for one member of Parliament to represent a constituency populated by 110,000 and another MP to represent a population of 55,000 or less.

Even though each citizen of Canada has one vote in a general election, the votes when counted are not equal. In the case I just outlined, those smaller constituencies require only half as many votes to elect their representative as do those in the larger constituencies. Those representatives in turn vote on matters of concern to all the people of Canada in this House on their behalf.

The boundaries commissioners who are appointed to redraw boundaries when populations change are also charged with taking into account local trading patterns, communities of interest, geographical barriers to movement and local economic conditions. Past experience has shown this has not always been the case. Therefore, changes in the way we do this stuff is important.

To a certain extent this bill addresses a few of the problems we should be looking at for the future. I will address some of those changes in just a moment. First, I think it is important that we do