

Electoral Boundaries

the most experienced, and having seen this parliament operate at least since 1972, I am not completely sure that the best interests, not only of Canadians but of members of parliament generally in the operation of the system, will be served by a method by which for the first time there will be no end to the number of members who may be in the House.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton): Frankly I think that it is a question principle that the House, in a country of 23 million people, should now embark on a procedure which goes on and on, at least in principle, until it is stopped by legislation of this House. It is really a bad principle. There is more to the representation of people in parliament than merely numbers; there is an aspect of quality to representation. Quality will vary with the member, but the mere insertion of a numerical factor does not guarantee that the House will be a better place. The open end addition of members, however, will guarantee that parliament will become even more unwieldy than it is; that parliament, as a matter of sheer mathematics, will become more expensive than it is; and that it can become less responsive than it is today. These are guarantees as a result of the principle set forth in the bill.

As I said, there are more things to being a member of parliament, and as a member of parliament I would like to see improved, not just the number of my colleagues, but the work that all of us can do on all sides of the House. The first thing that I think is the hallmark of good representative government is that the representation not merely reflect the population but reflect the awareness of the fact that there is opportunity to gain knowledge of the operation of government by all members of the House. Not just for the sake of the member himself, but because our system of government has as its foundation the fact that there is always in the House, at least in principle but sometimes in fact, an alternate government. There is the principle that there ought to be men and women on all sides of the House who, subject to the doctrine of cabinet solidarity and secrecy, have equal knowledge. I do not think that our system today, which breathes and lives on orders in council, on press releases and on ministerial statements when the government decides to make them, leads to good representative government. I would like to see efforts made to adopt the principle of knowledge rather than the numerical principle, as I first mentioned.

Second, I believe that there should be power among members of parliament—all of them, not just in the opposition—to examine the way in which the executive branch, that branch of government which for better or worse is becoming more powerful in our community, conducts itself. I think that if any lesson has been brought home to me since I have come to this place, it is that the right of the private member, the backbencher, whether he sits to the right of Mr. Speaker or to his left, is being diminished. It has been diminished, I suppose, because that cannot help but happen in a very complex society. But it has been diminished as well because institutions within this institution have allowed this to happen, in fact have copped out. That has happened on both sides of the House. The real cause is to ensure that there is this ability in the

backbencher of the House to examine and probe, no matter where he sits.

I think that we should have a committee structure that really functions—and that is perhaps more important than the number of members or the people they represent—one that will allow real investigation by private members, by the representatives of the people in the House, of the power of government and how it uses it. We should have a committee structure which is not partisan but which will follow in an evolutionary and continuing way the examination of the estimates and of the operations, expenditures and functions of each department of government, not just to embarrass or to delay but to improve. We do not have that here in the House and we are a long way from it. That is how I would like to see this parliament improved.

I think that the principle of the bill is based solely on the numbers aspect of representation, and in that sense the bill is narrow and is wrong. I am not one who would dare say, whether I believed it or not, that representation by population is not important. Of course it is important. But we should not let that catchword, that cliché, blind us to the importance of the functioning of the House, a House of a reasonable size, where there can be some informality in debate, in order to improve the representative quality that the public of Canada expects from us.

I do not think that the public is prepared at this time to endorse a blank cheque to cover the cost of the operation of parliament. If we pass this bill, that is exactly what they will have to do. Within this bill there are sufficient principles which would increase the number of members without limit. We do not approve of this and we have indicated that we intend to oppose this bill. We cannot accept the suggestion that this is the only way in which representation can be approached. We feel that it is not sufficient, in dealing with the problems of the people of Canada and their representation in the House, to say that we must now adopt for the first time a principle that has no end to it in terms of numbers.

We believe that there should be a form of protection for certain provinces which face a diminution in population, but we think there must be a balance between the two approaches. Having said that we cannot accept the open end principle and that we must accept the fact of Canadian life that there are certain provinces the representation of which is diminishing perhaps unfairly, we must in those circumstances vote against this bill. We will be voting against it on the grounds and in the hope that in the time remaining to us there will be sufficient discussion of the bill not only by members of parliament but by other interested bodies and learned writers in the country. It is important that the principles and ancillary aspects of this bill be recognized before the bill, or something like it if there is an amendment in committee, be put before the House for final disposition.

● (2150)

Mr. Gordon Towers (Red Deer): Mr. Speaker, I rise to take part in this debate hoping that I did not detect a suggestion of blackmail in the remarks of the hon. member for Kenora-Rainy River (Mr. Reid). In a democratic country members of parliament are elected to speak for the