

Government Orders

In the last election I was running as a rookie. The people from Elections Canada who were looking after things were all appointed by the Conservative government that preceded this government. I must compliment all of the people that I was associated with at Elections Canada. They were impartial and fair to everyone. In particular, I would use this occasion to compliment our returning officer, Patricia Collins, who went out of her way to be fair to me.

When we as a political institution start to change the rules that are established, whether we like them or not, we are treading on fairly thin ice. That is the reason that I am standing to speak against this motion today. If we do not like the rules then we have the privilege of changing them any time we want. However, there is no reason to suggest that the electoral boundary change cannot go forward as it would normally have done.

• (1750)

I am not in favour of changing the number of seats in the House. It could have been frozen at substantially less years ago. However the very people who are now making the case for freezing the number of seats, during the Charlottetown accord when the number of seats in this House were going to grow amazingly, not one word was raised against it. Different times make different priorities.

When I thought I wanted to speak to this and the new wrinkle of closure was added to the soup that an earlier colleague described, I thought why not phone the Library of Parliament and ask them to send over a few topic headings under the term "closure" and then I would glean from that a few examples of members' opposite when they were in opposition railing against the government of the day on the issue of closure.

There are three pages. So we just grabbed one to use as an example. Then I thought I had better be a little careful because I am sure that when members opposite were railing against closure when they were in opposition they had no idea that these words would be coming back at them in such a short time.

However, I must use one example and this is from *Hansard*, May 29, 1991, the hon. member representing Ottawa—Vanier:

Since I began my remarks on the government's heavy-handed motion to reinstate certain bills, for which it could not receive unanimous consent because they are indeed not very good bills, a new element has been introduced into the debate—closure. It is now using its majority, the tyranny of the majority, to impose upon the rest of us its will.

That is far from being democratic.

Therefore, I am a little nervous about introducing this because I know that if we are as successful as we hope to be, we will be sitting on the other side of the House.

An hon. member: Not to worry about it.

Mr. McClelland: Not to worry about it? Fine, not to worry about it.

An hon. member: Do not worry about it.

Mr. McClelland: No, you worry about it. That is right.

Lo and behold I am having my corn flakes this morning knowing that I am going to speak to this today and from today's *Globe and Mail* I would recommend to hon. members and to those of you watching these proceedings on television a very worthwhile article called "Debasing the Franchise". This is part one of three articles. I recommend it to everyone so they can catch a bit of the flavour and a bit of the history of just what we are talking about here. It is in today's *Globe and Mail* and there will be another article tomorrow and then the next day. If I may I will read just a small bit from today's *Globe and Mail*. It has to do with representation by population and distribution.

In any event in 1947 they had a pretty good idea that what they were going to do was base the number of seats by the representative population that Canada had and then divide that by the number of provinces and presto, you have the number of seats. As one province increases they get more seats and as another province decreases it gets less seats, except in the case of Prince Edward Island which was guaranteed four seats. That seemed like a pretty good idea at the time but it did not last.

I would like to suggest a way out of this muddle. I would suggest that we have a limit on the number of seats. There certainly will not be any problem from this side of the House in saying that we should not be increasing the number of seats in the House of Commons. Let us freeze it at 295. Let us have a strict representation by population in the House. Every province will be represented strictly in its proportionate number of seats by its population with no floors; no floors for Quebec and no floors for Prince Edward Island. Then how do we go about representing the regions or the provinces in Canada?

• (1755)

Let us have a Senate that represents the provinces. Let us have a triple-E Senate. That will get us out of this mess. We can have a House of Commons that will be strictly representation by population. That is magic, is it not? Then we have a Senate that represents the provinces.

A member opposite said they had not heard of this before. There may even be a few people out there in television land who