

*Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Suspension*

parliament to make himself heard and for us to be silent would be a breach of faith with our constituents. This bill to postpone the proposed new redistribution is one of those issues. Over the past few days we have heard several speakers from all parties putting forward major arguments both for and against postponing redistribution and I have followed the debate with interest. I would like to add my voice to those members who have spoken against immediate redistribution of electoral boundaries.

As a rural member of parliament, the validity of the case against redistribution is apparent to me. Many of the arguments used in defence of our position are well known. I used them myself in my presentation to the federal Electoral Boundaries Commission earlier this year. The demands upon rural and urban members are different, and communications within an urban riding are often much easier than within a rural constituency stretching over several hundred square miles. It takes time for a rural member to win the recognition and trust of his constituents on a person to person basis, which is important if he is to serve them properly. The minorities—the young, the old, the poor, and the ethnic groups—can all be brought into full participation in our democracy, but it takes time and stability for this to be done.

Regular redistribution merely serves to destroy much of the work that a conscientious member of parliament does between elections. Areas without any community of interest are regularly placed together in a new constituency, and by the time they begin to work together as a unit they are again torn apart. Redistribution often means that a rural area which was once represented by a rural member of parliament finds itself submerged by the much greater numbers in an urban area to which it is joined in redistribution. This particular phenomenon will take place in my home town if redistribution goes through as planned.

All these arguments are valid and in themselves afford ample justification for the postponement of redistribution. But today I would like to address my remarks to the contention of some urban members that those of us who oppose redistribution are somehow undemocratic. In any debate of this kind we hear the proponents of redistribution say that rural areas are already vastly over-represented, that on the basis of representation by population it is apparent that rural constituencies have been getting more than their share of power in government. It is this claim that we have been getting too much representation that I would like to discuss.

I do not think anyone here today would try to deny the fact that the number of voters in a rural constituency in this country is often much smaller than in urban constituencies. Certainly, I would not. It would appear from a superficial analysis of representation in Canada that rural Canadians like myself have a great deal more say than our numbers entitle us to have. But the people who are satisfied with these assertions refuse to look beyond the most superficial level. If we want to see which group really dominates government in Canada, we should not be looking at those of us who sit in the back benches but, rather, at those who sit in the front rows: members of the cabinet, the shadow cabinet, and the leaders of our national parties. The vast preponderance of this group is urban. They represent urban constituencies. They had urban jobs

[Mr. Beatty (Wellington-Grey-Dufferin-Waterloo).]

before they were elected, and they were given an urban education. Their way of viewing the problems of Canada is urban, and their priorities are urban priorities.

• (1630)

About all that rural Canadians can be assured of being able to claim on the front benches is the Department of Agriculture and the chairmanship of the various agricultural committees of party caucuses. And it was not very long ago that even the Minister of Agriculture represented an urban seat. The power within the House of Commons is already in the hands of urban members. But what about the other aspects of government, the political parties and the civil service? The answer to that question is just as simple. Our political parties are run from the cities by people who live in the cities, who take advice from urban advisers, who received urban educations, who collect money from urban businesses and urban unions and who contract for work to be done by urban suppliers. They often wear blinders in respect of the needs of rural party members.

Our bureaucracy in Canada is centred in Ottawa and in the other large cities. The people who dominate the Treasury Board, who design our economic strategy and who run the various departments and agencies of government are not rural Canadians. They come from the cities. They often have an urban contempt for rural people and their problems. Yet we hear that rural Canadians dominate our governments and they must be further stripped of whatever influence remains to them in government.

Unquestionably, some of the members of this House are dubious about the ill effects that can be caused for rural Canadians by having decisions made in the cities. Anyone who doubts the implications of urban control of government need only look at programs such as Opportunities for Youth, LIP and those under the Canada Council to discover that the lives of rural Canadians are being shaped, not by their local councils which are responsive to their needs and their desires, not by their members of the federal or provincial parliaments but by bureaucrats in Ottawa or in the other cities who systematically bypass local governments and determine for themselves what is in the best interests of rural Canadians. And as the cost of the government and the scope of its activities grow, the power of rural Canadians to live their own lives in freedom and to develop in their own way grows less and less.

Perhaps the creeping impotence of that part of Canada beyond the borders of our great cities is best symbolized by the federal task force on agriculture that was composed, not of farmers—because farmers would not be capable of planning for the future of agriculture—but by four academics and one chartered accountant. In their recommendations they constructed a 1990s model of agriculture that would drive even more family farmers from business and encourage even further rural depopulation. That report, commissioned by the federal government, would be the death sentence of rural Canada if it were implemented.

The argument that rural Canadians are being undemocratic in opposing an even greater shift of political power to the cities might make more sense if all that we had to consider was the structure of government. But if we are