

With Bill C-69, the government is trying to allow sitting members' input in the redistribution process right from the beginning by having a veto over the majority membership of each commission. That is also another question of principle. That, alone, is enough to reject this proposed act. That argument and all the other arguments, to which I have added those of our friends opposite to reinforce them, have convinced me and my colleagues that this country will be better off by allowing the present process to be completed and by having the maps, which will be confirmed and go into place in January, 1997. In so doing, there is a good possibility that the next election will be based on what is being completed now to confirm that British Columbia and Ontario will have their additional seats. Otherwise, Bill C-69 will, in all likelihood, see the next election fought on the basis of the present distribution.

That, alone, is enough reason for us to confirm that this bill is not in the public interest. It is in the interest of a small number of people who has its own selfish gains at heart more than those of the Canadian public and the regions of this country. That is what we are here for, and that is reason enough to vote against the motion.

Hon. Sharon Carstairs: Honourable senators, earlier the Leader of the Opposition suggested — and I will put it in that framework — that both myself and Senator Fairbairn said that there was no role for the Senate to play in this particular piece of legislation. That is the opposite to what Senator Fairbairn and I have said repeatedly. We have stated that there is a very clear role for the Senate, but the Senate in its entirety and not the Senate in committee. However, it has been the choice of those opposite to bury Bill C-69 in committee and not allow it to come to a vote on the floor of this chamber.

If all senators are to do their duty appropriately and to fulfil their mandate constitutionally, then one of the most fundamental parliamentary acts that they must participate in is a vote. That does not mean the few senators on the Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee; it means all the senators. That is what we have urged over and over again, namely, that all senators vote on Bill C-69. That is why I urge you this evening to vote at 5:30 for that process to take place, so that all senators can stand up and be counted on Bill C-69.

My primary reason for speaking today is to address the remarks made earlier by Senator Beaudoin. Senator Beaudoin, in quoting from the entirety of Senator Flynn's speech — and in so doing, I think he made an important contribution — mentioned the same phrase that Senator Lynch-Staunton has just mentioned, namely, that the Senate had a real role to play in a matter of principle.

Senator Beaudoin then went on to address his remarks to the 25-per-cent rule, the rule upon which populations of constituencies should be based, except in extraordinary

circumstances. It is that particular point that I wish to address today.

Honourable senators he believes that a 15-per-cent rule would be more equitable, and more representative of one citizen, one vote. However, honourable senators, the reality in Canada is that there is not a system of one citizen, one vote. We have, as a result of constitutional limitations and geographic disparity, tremendous differences in the number of votes per constituency that are eligible to be cast in any given election.

For example, we do not have a national quotient. We have provincial quotients. By their very nature, provincial quotients are extremely uneven. According to the 1981 census, upon which the present boundaries are based, the provincial quotient for P.E.I., for example, is 30,627 people. The provincial quotient for Ontario is 90,116 people. In other words, if you are a voter in Ontario, your vote is only worth one-third of a Prince Edward Islander's vote — perhaps that is appropriate — or, to put it another way, if you are an Islander, your vote is worth three times the vote of an Ontarian. Is that fair? Is it equitable? Of course it is not, but it is reality. It is reality because Prince Edward Island has a constitutional guarantee of four seats.

Honourable senators, that is not the only distortion.

• (1540)

What if we were to apply the 15-per-cent rule based on the 1981 census? I went back and looked at all of the constituencies in 1981 to see how many would be out of sync as the result of a 15-per-cent rule at the national level. The national quotient would be 90,000 minus 15, which would be 77,000; plus 15 would be 104,000.

I looked at the constituency boundaries and I discovered that, clearly, all four in P.E.I. would be in violation; two in Newfoundland; five in Nova Scotia; seven in New Brunswick; 12 in Quebec; eight in Ontario; eight in Manitoba; 10 in Saskatchewan; four in Alberta; two in British Columbia; one in the Yukon and both ridings of the Northwest Territories.

I decided I must look at those constituencies to find out what it was they had in common. All those ridings are in smaller provinces or in rural areas — and I include the north — or they are in both.

Honourable senators, this is the geographic reality of Canada. Surely these Canadians are entitled to some equality not just in their voting but in their representation. Surely their members of Parliament should be able to get to see them every now and then.

Madam Justice McLachlin, in the Supreme Court ruling in the so-called "Carters" case, which involved Saskatchewan boundaries, allowed the 25-per-cent rule in that province. Incidentally, we also have a similar 25-per-cent rule for communities outside of Winnipeg in Manitoba. This very important ruling states: