

*Redistribution Commission*

I have not done any detailed research—the other place has never altered what has been done in this place in the past. Therefore, because it has to do with the composition of this house, and because it is imposed upon all of us by the constitution, the question of redistribution is peculiarly the duty—and not one that any of us regards with much relish, I think—of all of us in this house.

I may say at once that the government has no intention of trying to impose its will, and has no desire to do so; I want to emphasize that. As I said earlier we are committed to the principle of an independent, impartial redistribution to be performed outside this house. But as I indicated in answer to a question from the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre the other day, we in the government do not feel that we are committed to any detail on either of these measures. We do not intend to regard the bills as government measures except technically. Because technically they are government measures; they are taken up in government time and are introduced by a minister of the crown. However, we feel that the collective wisdom of this house should be brought to bear on this problem and that any good suggestion from any quarter should be incorporated into these measures without any thought of partisan consideration. We will welcome improvements from any quarter of the house to either of the bills. It is true, of course, that for the financial provisions of the bill which would follow this particular resolution the government has naturally to take its proper responsibility and, of course, intends to do so; but for every other aspect of these measures if there is a better way that anyone can suggest of doing these things than that suggested in the bills, and if it commends itself to the majority of the house, I can assure hon. members in all parts of the house that there will be no quarrel from this side.

I should like to say a word or two about the history of the proposals I am now seeking to outline. We in the government regarded the problem of redistribution, I think rightly, as one of the most urgent problems facing us when we took office. I discussed this matter with the chief electoral officer the day I became a minister. The following day the cabinet authorized the chief electoral officer to enlist the co-operation of the bureau of statistics and of the surveyor general's branch of the Department of Mines and Technical Surveys with a view to making every kind of technical preparation which could properly be advanced. At that time the census information was available, and this would have made available the technical material required for redistribution as soon

as parliament could act and determine upon how it should be accomplished.

The chief electoral officer suggested to me that it would be helpful if he visited Australia and New Zealand, where they have a very long experience of impartial redistribution, and where in Australia the situation is very similar to our own. That suggestion received my approval, and I think his visit has been one of the most useful things which could possibly have been done. The chief electoral officer had studied the system in those countries and in Great Britain and elsewhere, but actually seeing those countries and talking to the people who carried out these functions I think gave him a much better appreciation both of the difficulties and of the methods that need to be applied in this very complicated kind of problem.

I should perhaps add that the chief electoral officer told me something at the beginning of our discussion which horrified me. He told me that his estimate was that it would take a commission so long to consider the question that it would not be possible to have an election under redistribution before the autumn of 1968. I see the hon. member for Digby-Annapolis-Kings smiles; I suppose I am not the only person who has received such advice. I must say that I said I should not like to have to make a proposal to parliament with that kind of timetable attached to it, and I remarked that there must surely be some other way of doing this more rapidly. But the more I went into it the more complex and difficult it appeared; and to be quite frank with you, sir, the more impossible it seemed to me to expect one single commission composed of eminent persons who would have to be selected for this purpose, but who would probably feel they could not give their full time to it, to accomplish it in any reasonable time.

Therefore I made the suggestion to the chief electoral officer that we have four commissions, one for Quebec, one for Ontario, one for the four Atlantic provinces and one for the four western provinces. We gave quite a lot of thought to this possibility. Then when the chief electoral officer came back from Australia he advised me that in Australia they had a separate commission for each of the states, that to have a commission straddling two or more states would mean that one would not save very much expense but that one would lose a good deal of time, and that one would not have within the commission the same intimate knowledge of local conditions which one would have within a commission from a single state. I must say that this argument seemed to me to be very compelling, besides which it seemed to me