

year 1988, and at the earliest possible moment Parliament will move to change the unfair provisions of this bill, particularly those unfair provisions relating to the smaller provinces.

Hon. Finlay MacDonald: Just for clarification, and with a short preamble, would Senator MacEachen permit a question?

I do not want to get into a discussion as to whether or not we should have a larger House of Commons, as was anticipated under the amalgam formula, but since we have no quarrel with regard to the projection of population, and since you have twice mentioned what you refer to as the "reasonable amendment" proposed by Senator Stewart, and since those of us from the Atlantic region do not want to take a back seat to anyone with respect to the protection of our interests, and our entitlements—which I refer to as our rightful claim—I ask Senator MacEachen to tell us how we could defend our credibility if we were to promote the consequences of Senator Stewart's formula, which shows our population remaining constant at 9.2 per cent, at 9.1 per cent and at 9.3 per cent, and our representation in the House of Commons going to 11.4 per cent from 9.2 per cent, to 12.7 per cent from 9.1 per cent, and finally to 13.5 per cent from 9.3 per cent? Could we be credible in the eyes of the other provinces if we were to promote that?

Senator MacEachen: I think that Senator MacDonald has raised a very interesting point. Never has this country established its representation system solely on the basis of population. That is the answer—that we represent provinces and that if they are to have their place in Confederation, then—if I understood the question, perhaps I did not—I do not think that we can rely entirely upon strict representation by population. We are not modelled on a Greek city state in this country. That is why, please believe me, I am not opposing the necessary increase of members in those provinces with very rapidly growing populations, but I am conscious of the role of a province like Nova Scotia and Manitoba. If the amalgam formula had not been adopted, Nova Scotia, in the Commons today, would have one fewer seat, as would Manitoba. I do not think that, for a province like Nova Scotia or Manitoba, one more seat would stretch my credibility very much, particularly if one does not believe that arithmetic is the sole determinant, and the country has never agreed to that.

● (1510)

Hon. John B. Stewart: Honourable senators, would Senator MacEachen permit a question? Does not Senator MacEachen realize that the amendment which I was proposing addressed itself, in its first part, specifically, to the redistribution based on the census of 1981? My proposed amendment would have imposed a statutory obligation on the Parliament of Canada to review the situation immediately after the next census, so that the kind of situation that Senator MacDonald refers to could have been anticipated and dealt with adequately by Parliament.

Senator Phillips: The answer is no.

Senator MacEachen: Yes, I realize that. I thought that the amendment which Senator Stewart put forward was the mini-

mal amendment that could be made in the circumstances, because it would not be possible for the Senate to redraw the whole bill; it would not be unreasonable to ask the minister to consider adding three more seats in addition to those which he had already added for the larger provinces. The review that would subsequently be made would consider what the next phase might be. I thought that the purpose of the amendment was really an effort to overcome an immediately urgent unfairness. I had certainly thought of other amendments, but here was one that was hard to turn down, in my opinion, because it was for a term specific.

Hon. Joyce Fairbairn: Honourable senators, I have no desire to hold up passage of this bill this afternoon, so I will be brief. I have followed the discussion of Bill C-74 with care and with a mounting anxiety. I wish to thank Senator Stewart in particular for his efforts to force attention on the basic issues involved in this legislation. I use the word "force" deliberately because it really is the case. This issue of changing the representation in the House of Commons is so complex that it has been extraordinarily difficult for Senator Stewart and others to impress upon their colleagues some of the very basic concerns which ultimately will affect the regional balance in Parliament for years to come. This has not been an area in which I have had any particular expertise, and it has been mainly because of the persistence of Senator Stewart and others on the Standing Senate Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs that I have made a point of trying to come to grips with the implications behind the reassuring words that have accompanied the introduction of this legislation by the government. My uneasiness has grown into some alarm at these future implications, which, in terms of my province of Alberta, might not be that far in the future.

I, like Senator MacEachen, have a feeling that this bill is a "sleeper" in that many people, even those active in politics and political organizations, may have the impression that the system is unfolding as it should simply because a bill has been passed. They may be in for one heck of a shock if an election is called in a year or so and the old rules are still in place. It is for this reason, honourable senators, that I wish to register my very real concern that the process which has produced this bill may already have jeopardized the opportunity of the province of Alberta and its sister province of British Columbia to finally claim the extra representation which they deserve in the House of Commons because of the growth of their populations over the last two decades.

Currently, as honourable senators are aware, Alberta has 21 seats in the House of Commons. Had the present system of electoral adjustment been completed and ready for the next election—a process which was in the final stages, as others have said, prior to the 1984 election—based on the census of 1981, Alberta would enjoy six more seats, for a total of 27; British Columbia would have five more, for a total of 33. Under this process, the number of seats in the House of Commons would have risen from 282 to 310, in total, which obviously would have entailed physical adjustment to accommodate such an increase and, indeed, even larger increases in