

*Electoral Boundaries*

pointed out, there was one slight qualification to that right at the beginning, namely, that no province was to lose any seats at a redistribution unless its population dropped by 5 per cent or more.

Then it was not very long, in that first era of our redistribution history, until the reduction in the number of seats in the Atlantic provinces made it necessary to do something to protect Prince Edward Island in particular. Hence a floor was built into the constitution in 1915 which provided that no province was to have fewer members in the House of Commons than it had members in the other place. So, even in that period between 1867 and 1946, when we had what we thought was a system of representation by population, it was varied because of the requirements of the situation.

In 1946 we switched from a basis of 65 seats for Quebec and the other provinces in proportion thereto to a system based on a fixed total number of seats for the House of Commons. Then we decided we would divide that total number of seats among the provinces in proportion to their respective populations, but the very minute we wrote that system we made some qualifications in it.

We carried forward, for example, the Senate floor which was already there. We provided for seats for the Yukon Territory and the Northwest Territories despite their lesser populations, and it was not long after that until we got the "Gardiner rule" written into the constitution, which provided that no province should lose at any redistribution seats greater than 15 per cent of the number of seats it had before. It was a very complicated rule. But the point I am making is that again, in the 1946 to the present era, we decided that representation by population had to be qualified because of the make-up of this country.

● (1610)

Now we are changing, we are going back to a basic number for the province of Quebec, and we are deciding that it is to be 75 for this decade, with the provision that in each succeeding decade that number will increase by four, in other words to 79 in the 1980's, to 83 in the 1990's, to 87 in the twenty-first century, and so on, on the basis of that province having a fixed number. We are deciding that the rest of the provinces are to have their seats in proportion thereto.

However, we are still faced with the fact that when you apply strict representation by population, small provinces like Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick would suffer greatly if some floor were not provided, and we are carrying forward in effect the floor we have had. We are dropping the reference to the Senate—that of course pleases me and I would vote for the bill on that count—but we are carrying forward the actual floors of four for P.E.I., and ten for New Brunswick.

We have also come to the realization that if there are floors for some very small provinces, it is right to expect floors for provinces that are a little larger but are still small. We from the prairie provinces, particularly from Manitoba and Saskatchewan, have accepted the fact that P.E.I. and New Brunswick were entitled to their floors, but we wondered why we were not also entitled to some such provision. So, as I see it, what we are doing in this

[Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre).]

new bill is something akin to what is done by many organizations.

I do not hold it up necessarily as the only example, but I looked this morning at the constitution of the NDP—you can be sure of course that whatever we do is logical—and I find that there is a provision in our constitution regarding delegates to our national convention, which states that there is one delegate for the first 50 members, another delegate for the next 50, and so on up to 200 members, but once the membership in a constituency is over 200, the number of delegates becomes one per 100. What is true for the NDP, I suggest, is probably true for other parties, union organizations and all kinds of bodies, namely, that you provide a little larger representation for the first numbers but, as the numbers increase, you moderate it slightly.

So what we are doing in this bill, it seems to me, is very straightforward and clear. We accept the fact that in Canada we have three groups of provinces: we have large ones, we have middle-sized ones, and we have small ones, just like the Three Bears. The large ones at the moment are Ontario and Quebec; the middle-sized ones are Alberta and British Columbia; the smaller ones, the working ones, the ones from which come the real ideas, are the other two prairie provinces, Saskatchewan and Manitoba, and the four Atlantic provinces, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia and Newfoundland.

What we decided is that in the case of the two large provinces the relationship between them shall be exactly proportional to their numbers. We give Quebec 75, and Ontario's number shall be exactly proportional to Quebec in terms of its population. Then we are deciding that the middle-sized provinces shall get a slightly better deal, and after that we have decided that the smaller provinces shall have a break that is slightly better still.

When you read the convoluted language of the bill you may wonder what it says, but that is what it says. The formula provides for Quebec and Ontario to have numbers that are directly proportional to their population. In the case of the smaller provinces, we decided that the quotient that applied in the preceding redistribution is to apply in the new one, and if that results in those provinces holding their own number of seats or getting more, that is what they will get. In the case of the middle-sized provinces we decided that they would get half of whatever that formula would give to them, so that they fare a little better than Ontario and Quebec but not quite as well as the six smaller provinces.

I say "fare better, or fare not quite as well" in terms of their absolute numbers, but I suggest that in terms of fairness of representation, the scheme works out fairly well. I am reasonably hopeful, with the one qualification that the hon. member for Dauphin made, and I am inclined to go along with it, that this scheme may stand up better than the one we produced in 1946, and still better than the one that was produced in 1867.

I can imagine that in the 1980's or the 1990's there may be some concern about this House becoming too large, but dealing with that should wait until we see what the population is in those years, and what facilities there are to enable members to deal with the problems of their constituents. I believe the whole question of communica-