

*British North America Act*

The hon. member for Port Arthur (Mr. Fisher), in introducing his bill, would like somehow to suggest to the house that the distribution of electoral seats should be done in a manner completely different from the one now in use. I am in full agreement with my hon. friend the member for Joliette-L'Assomption-Montcalm (Mr. Pigeon) when he explained a moment ago that any amendment to the B.N.A. Act should be a matter for unanimous consent by all provinces and the federal government, because it is a pact. On the other hand, the bill submitted to this house aims at finding a remedy or, at least a method of implementing section 51 of the B.N.A. Act. And the hon. member for Port Arthur wants the distribution of seats in the house to be handled by a body or rather by a commission independent of parliament.

To me it is inconceivable that hon. members of this house should not be called upon to give their own views on redistribution, because they, more than anyone should be familiar with the overall pattern of this country, as they are representing all its ridings. On the other hand, I am not in favour of creating a body or commission, which would not come under the immediate jurisdiction of the House of Commons.

This is in fact an opinion expressed some years ago by the Right Hon. William Lyon Mackenzie King in 1933. If we refer to the official record of this house for 1952, pages 3897 and following, we will see that there was a discussion in the house on this matter when there was before it a proposed redistribution of seats. At that time, as previously, all party leaders were unanimous in suggesting the setting up of a commission or body of that type. Some hon. members even went so far as to suggest the setting up of a committee composed of judges. I cannot see hon. judges, who are removed from politics, having to travel from one point to another in this country in order to carry out a work of a purely political nature.

I believe that all members of the opposition, among whom are hon. members of the C.C.F. party, as well as members of the party in power, are unanimous in looking for a solution which would be such as to make it clearer to the Canadian people why such and such change is being made during the redistribution of electoral seats. The people are not sufficiently informed on the reasons that would justify a committee of the house to make certain changes such as, lopping off

[Mr. Paul.]

part of a constituency and adding it to another one. Some people cannot understand the real meaning of a census in this regard and, consequently, they cannot realize why such a change is made.

Well, the establishment of an independent body or commission which could be made up of economists or surveyors appointed by the provincial and federal governments would be one way of ensuring a fairer distribution of constituencies. As regards the number of constituencies in each of the provinces, the ten provinces would have to be consulted and then the house could consider the report of such a commission. Besides, the house would always have the power to accept or reject such a report.

At present, the redistribution of electoral seats is made by a committee which sets up one or more sub-committees to consider the need, the advantages or the necessity of redistributing the ridings. Whoever we are, we are human, and naturally we tend to protect members of our own party who might perhaps lose a large section of their riding. So much so that a member, with no ill intention perhaps, might accede to the request of a colleague which however might not truly meet the economic situation.

We are 265 members coming from different parts of Canada and I do not think that any one member can be familiar with the economic needs of every part of the country. A committee made up of 40 or 50 members would not be able to study the real needs of the country as a whole and, as I said a moment ago, this committee could instinctively make decisions which would not be in the interest of the population at large. Furthermore, in these serious times, when our parliamentary institutions seem to be directly attacked by ideologies contrary to our own, it is our utmost duty to try to improve that situation in order that this need which comes up every ten years may be truly met according to local conditions and according to the population of each of the electoral ridings.

As I said a few moments ago, we could appoint economists or land surveyors who would study the main reasons for a certain number of electors to be included in one electoral constituency, rather than in another.

I believe that the members of parliament would be the true spokesmen of the people they represent because, at the present time, some constituencies are too often made up in large part of a labour population side by