

Redistribution Commission

for the very good, technical reason which the right hon. gentleman has indicated, in order to conform with the rules of the house. The bill as it is now drafted envisages a procedure not for one redistribution but, if it meets the wishes of both houses, is something that would become a fundamental statute; it would provide the means of carrying on redistribution for the future.

It seemed to me that it would be desirable not to include in that measure, which has a general application for the future, a lot of mechanical and financial provisions relating to the specific redistribution measure that is now before us. That is the only reason for there being two bills. It would have been quite possible to put everything into one bill, but it seemed to me that looking to the future, if we could in our wisdom in this chamber and in the other place provide at the present time a means of dealing with this problem whenever it arises after each decennial census, so there would not have to be basic legislation brought before parliament every ten years, we would be doing a service to future parliaments. I am sure the right hon. Leader of the Opposition, the hon. member for Winnipeg South Centre and the hon. member for Digby-Annapolis-Kings, who have very recently served in the government of Canada, are just as conscious as anyone who is on the treasury benches today of the immense demands that are made for parliamentary time. If we can do something, and do it well, that will save parliamentary time in the future, it seems to me it would be a sensible thing to do.

Mr. Diefenbaker: Without abridging the full rights of parliament.

Mr. Pickersgill: Precisely. The right hon. gentleman is more than right about that; without abridging the full rights of parliament. I think—and here again I have been assisted by the right hon. gentleman—that before I go on to talk about any of the details of this measure it would be proper for me to indicate the kind of attitude with which the government is approaching this problem and with which I, as the spokesman for the government in this particular matter, am endeavouring to approach it.

The measure now before us and the other bill, of which notice has been given on the order paper, represent a serious endeavour by this government, after a full study of the matter, to eliminate abuses of the past, to make the House of Commons truly representative and at the same time give this commission certain ground rules and directions from parliament as to the principles it should accept. It is an endeavour at the same time to grant flexibility in the

interests of fairness in order to ensure that the considerations that have always been in the minds of governments since 1867 shall be maintained.

It must also be pointed out to the commission that rural ridings must necessarily, in the experience of the past, have less population in general than urban ridings, and that there are other considerations, such as geographical lines, rivers, county lines and the like which must be taken into account. But all these considerations shall be based on the assurance that an independent commission will bring about a redistribution that is fair, just and reasonable; one that will be determined not on the basis of the frailties of human nature, which all of us have, but on a basic principle that the political advantage of the government or a majority in the house shall not be one of the considerations to be taken into account or given any attention.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Pickersgill: In other words we want to follow the lead that has been given by almost every nation, certainly by commonwealth nations and the mother of parliaments, that membership in parliament shall be determined fairly by the people.

Hon. members may suspect and indeed some hon. members may know, because I have read this statement, that it is not my own. These were the words used by the right hon. gentleman opposite in April of last year when he introduced a similar resolution, and with his permission—I did not ask it in advance but I hope I have it now—I am making them my own, because the spirit in which the right hon. gentleman was approaching that matter at that time is the spirit in which this government is seeking to approach it at this time.

It is true that the word "commission" occurs on several occasions and that when the other bill, of which notice is given, is seen by the house and the public it will be seen that it should be in the plural instead of the singular. But with that exception I do not think there is a single word in this statement with which I would quarrel. I do not think there are—I hope there are not—many words in that statement with which any hon. member of this house would quarrel, because it does seem to me it is the objective that all of us have in mind. It is the objective to which all political parties in this house, I am happy to be able to say, seem to me to be committed. Moreover, the business, the task, the burden, if I may put it that way, of redistribution is a constitutional obligation which is imposed upon parliament, and particularly, of course, upon this chamber. I say that because, unless I am greatly mistaken—and I must confess

[Mr. Pickersgill.]