

● (1450)

The second reason is that a larger house will deny members an opportunity to participate. I cannot believe that a parliamentarian of experience would make that comment, because even today, with a house of 282 members, you will find that the burden upon the member of Parliament is so heavy, in terms of attendance in the House of Commons, in committee, in the constituency and elsewhere, that there is difficulty in manning the committees themselves. At least, that was my experience when I was Leader of the Government in the House of Commons for quite a number of years. Even though we had a majority, it was difficult to man the committees; not because members were goofing off—not at all—but because they had a great amount of work to do. Anyone who has been a member in the House of Commons knows that even today members, particularly from the Atlantic provinces, are over-stretched. Don't tell me anything about that. I represented a rural riding with six counties, and if it so happens under this bill, as it will, that the eastern areas of Nova Scotia are rearranged so that there will be only two seats, for example, on the Island of Cape Breton, then the work of those two members will be almost unbearable.

Senator Stewart proposed an amendment to relieve this situation for three provinces—Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and Manitoba. Why was it not possible to accept that amendment so that at least the pressure would be lightened upon the members from those provinces?

I regret very much that this bill has been introduced, and I regret very much that, because of the circumstances of the Senate, I cannot defeat the bill, because it is a bad bill. At the first opportunity, the House of Commons will move to correct the defects of this bill.

Why is it, honourable senators, that the additional seats that are provided for in this bill must all go to the three large provinces—Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia?

● (1500)

The President of the Privy Council introduced a bill which provided, initially, for 289 seats. The additional seven seats were conferred upon British Columbia, Alberta and Ontario. Please believe me when I say that I respect absolutely the requirements of these growing provinces. But in further debate, the number of additional seats already given to those three provinces was further enlarged. The bill was amended to increase the representation in the House of Commons to 295 seats, an increase of 13 seats in total, and all going to the larger provinces, with the smaller provinces being ignored and Quebec frozen. I speak about the method, but, as a senator from the Atlantic provinces, I express my displeasure and my regret that some lightening of the burden imposed upon those provinces was not effected.

Honourable senators, I am not appalled at the idea of growth in the size of the House of Commons, for the reasons which I have already stated. It would require some alteration in mentality, and some rearrangements in the operation of the House of Commons, perhaps, but I do not think that that is a decisive consideration. If, as the projections reveal, the ulti-

[Senator MacEachen.]

mate increases by the year 2001 under the amalgam method were considered to be beyond what could be accepted by the government, then why was some consideration not given to an increase in the representation of the smaller provinces? Why all the growth to the larger provinces? And why was it not possible for the government to accept the reasonable amendment that would have provided some abatement for three smaller provinces? The case of Newfoundland is really a scandal. The size of the province has been disregarded, as has the burden caused by the greater numbers of people that members will have to represent.

I make the case for the Atlantic provinces, but I also make the broader case that the provisions in this bill have twisted the needs of the country and put them into a straitjacket in which the country will not live as it had to live for a long period of time, with a growth of 7.5 million people and no growth in the membership of the House of Commons.

I am not going to go into all of the political considerations which occur to me, but I must say that I do not understand why the government could not have given some consideration to the Atlantic region of Canada.

With the projected increases in population, the present law would have given the Atlantic provinces 42 seats by the year 2001. That law is being amended and the Atlantic provinces are being frozen for the foreseeable future at 32 seats. Newfoundland would have received some additional seats, as would Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. Prince Edward Island, of course, would have remained with the Senate floor.

Another bizarre result of this bill is that the election of 1988 will be fought on the census of 1971. The provinces of Ontario, British Columbia and Alberta, which, under this bill, and under the present law, are entitled to substantial increases in the number of seats, will be denied those increases unless one can guarantee that the Prime Minister will not hold an election until the late fall of 1988. It would be very normal and, indeed, likely that the Prime Minister would consider calling an election in the spring of 1988.

Senator Flynn: That is what you did before!

Senator MacEachen: That would be normal and likely. But there would be a great hue and cry from the provinces of Alberta, Ontario and British Columbia, saying: "Do not have an election until we have our additional seats." The Prime Minister has put himself into the situation where the timing of the next election is no longer in his hands. The next election should be fought on the conclusions of the representation commissions, which had almost completed their work following the census of 1981. The Conservative Party in the House of Commons had participated and had raised no objection to the system in place, yet suddenly after the last election the process was arrested and now we are being cast into a totally new representation system.

Honourable senators, I make these points because they are very important points and because we have not heard the end of this bill. It may receive Royal Assent at an early date, but it is a "sleeper" that will come back to bedevil the country in the