

*Electoral Boundaries*

thing had to be done about facilities. The government took over the Confederation Building to provide additional space and staff, but it then became apparent that when the government began to expropriate the rest of Wellington Street this would not be satisfactory and it would be advisable to bring the public as well as the House of Commons into the procedure.

That is what the Abbott Commission was all about. It was designed to try to provide additional ways in which members of parliament could be more effective, and it looked into the staffing and facilities available to members. The Abbott Commission had nothing to do with this bill.

**Mr. Andre:** But the subject of the Abbott Commission reference was at least as important as the subject of this bill.

**Mr. Reid:** The subject matter of this bill is a method of redistributing parliamentary seats as between provinces and regions in Canada. Let me say at the outset that there is no one satisfactory method of satisfying everybody. This is a blunt fact of Canadian geography, and it is a blunt fact of distribution of parliamentary seats.

**Mr. Woolliams:** Would you permit a question?

**Mr. Reid:** Certainly.

**Mr. Woolliams:** The hon. member says that the Abbott Commission had nothing to do with the increase in the size of this House. Does that mean that when the Abbott Commission came up with the suggestion that we need more staff and more office space—

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Is the hon. member asking a question?

**Mr. Reid:** Yes.

**An hon. Member:** It just takes him a little longer than others.

**Mr. Woolliams:** I think it is a very important question, and it is a question, with great respect. If the Abbott Commission came up with a recommendation for more staff and facilities for members, would that not cost the taxpayers a lot more money, particularly when you consider an increase in the size of the House?

**Mr. Reid:** Of course, the answer to that is that if we increase the staff for members of parliament, that is going to increase the cost to the taxpayers as well. The point of the amalgam method is that nobody pretends, least of all the government, that it will satisfy all regions, all areas, all provinces and all constituencies. Obviously it is not possible to do that.

We have many problems. We have a number of provinces that have historical floors in respect of representation, and we have a law which prohibits the reduction of that representation. We cannot transfer enough seats from one province to another. Because we have these floors across the country it means that if we continue with the existing method, the disruptions that would take place

[Mr. Reid.]

in representation as between provinces and regions would get completely out of whack. All you have to do is look at the existing system as it dealt with redistribution. It was so bad that members of parliament unanimously passed a bill bringing an end to the operations of the electoral boundaries commission because it was obviously not satisfactory.

The amalgam method attempts to deal with the reality of historical floors. It attempts to deal with the realities of very large provinces, and it tries to deal with the fact that some provinces are not small and not large but somewhere in between and are growing. Because we have the floors and peculiar forces of population growth and geography in Canada, we had to come up with a formula that would treat everyone reasonably equitably, but nobody exactly as fairly as one would hope in terms of population on the basis of representation by population.

We freely admit that this is not a method based on representation by population, but it goes some distance in that direction. It accepts the principle that floors do exist, and it accepts the principle of our history.

**Mr. Andre:** And the principle that Alberta votes PC.

**Mr. Reid:** We have to look at the amalgam method as it deals with all of Canada, not how it deals with my province or my riding. Does it provide for the reasonable distribution of seats across Canada? Does it provide for a reasonable distribution of seats based on constituency size? Does it still provide reasonable representation in the House of Commons for all Canadians?

● (2130)

It is on those judgments that one must consider the decision of the parliamentary committee when it looked at the proposals. It had before it the proposal of the hon. member for Dauphin (Mr. Ritchie). Of the six proposals it had, the committee came down on the side of two, that of the hon. member for Dauphin and the amalgam method. It is not clear which way the vote would have gone in the committee, but from the point of view of the government whatever proposal was voted on by the committee would have been accepted. The election intervened, and after negotiations and consultations with members on the other side and their leaders, the government came to the conclusion that the amalgam method was acceptable. There is no attempt by the government to impose upon the House of Commons a system which is repugnant. This is a system which has come to the fore because it is simply the best of the proposals we had before us at the time.

We have not heard since the last election any proposals that were largely different from those the committee had discussed and those the government had worked out for the benefit of the House of Commons. As I say, the only one was that provided by the hon. member for Dauphin. He deserves kudos for having done the work and for having put in the effort to come up with an alternative system.

It is now 9.30 Mr. Speaker. I want to remind hon. members that the House of Commons is very short of time. It has been suggested that it will take a considerable length of time before the petroleum bill goes through, and it will also take considerable time before the income tax