

Redistribution

of interest and making adequate representation practically impossible;

(3) The geographic and demographic differences created by the proposed redistribution make the member's task even more difficult, especially in rural areas;

(4) The commission failed to apply the provisions of the statute for a population differential of up to 25 per cent, depending on whether rural, semi-rural or urban districts are concerned;

(5) The undersigned reserve the right to add any other reasons for objection which they may consider advisable and proper to be raised during the debate which they claim before this House, in particular the proposed names of certain districts.

Also, on June 12, 1973, a notice of objection in the form of a motion was filed with Mr. Speaker in the following terms, namely:

Proposed electoral district of Rosemont:

That, pursuant to section 20 of the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act (chapter E-2, R.S.C., 1970), consideration to be given by this House to the matter of an objection to the provisions of the report of the Electoral Boundaries Commission for the province of Quebec laid before this House by Mr. Speaker on May 14, 1973, on the grounds set forth hereinafter: (1) It is suggested that the name be Lafontaine, or the riding of Lafontaine-Rosemont; (2) The name of Lafontaine is a name with historical significance which should not be allowed to disappear.

[Translation]

Mr. Albert Béchard (Bonaventure-Îles de la Madeleine): Mr. Speaker, as a signer of the objection filed with the Chair on June 8, I think that it is my duty during the few minutes available to me to summarize my views on the report tabled by the Representation Commissioner.

In 1964, when Parliament passed the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act, I think that Canada made great strides toward democracy. I was then a member of the House and voted for that bill. You may rest assured that I do not regret it and that my objections this afternoon are not at all to that effect, since in 1964 when another minority government introduced a bill we wanted to prevent politicians from tampering with electoral boundaries, because—I am told at least—that the members could cut out, according to their whims, a constituency made up of a majority of their supporters.

This is why in 1963 the minority government of the late Lester B. Pearson introduced that bill which was passed by the House. He succeeded where several of his predecessors had failed.

My objection is not necessarily directed against commissioners, but the point I want to make in the two or three minutes remaining is the inflexibility shown by the commissioners in the administration of the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act. This rigidity is particularly shown in the fact that the commissioners seem to consider only the number of inhabitants in a region. Thus, for example, they absolutely do not think about social and economic circumstances in the areas that we represent.

● (1750)

If the findings of the report that was tabled by the Electoral Boundaries Commission of the province of Quebec were implemented, the region that I represent would be once again cut down by one member and, therefore, be deprived of a vote in the House of Commons.

At the time of the last redistribution of the electoral map in 1968, the Îles de la Madeleine disappeared. I inher-

[Mr. Deputy Speaker.]

ited it and I am proud of it. As long as they want me, I am prepared to represent this population which is the most engaging after that of the mainland riding of Bonaventure. But I say that when the new redistribution was made, they forgot among other things that Îles de la Madeleine have little or no relationships with the Bonaventure constituency or with the Gaspé Peninsula as a whole. The Îles de la Madeleine lie in the Gulf of St. Lawrence 150 miles from the coasts of the Gaspé Peninsula. Trade never is done with the Maritimes but with the United States. Then, you can understand how disappointed they were in 1968, not to have the member for Bonaventure as a representative but to be left aside whereas since 1947, the Îles de la Madeleine had been represented by a separate member.

Then, Mr. Speaker, since time is short and I want to give my colleagues the opportunity to express their views, I shall say that the number of inhabitants by district is given too much importance when reviewing the electoral map.

In a rural riding like mine, as in most other ridings in the province of Quebec, the member of parliament is more or less a social worker or an Unemployment Insurance Commission official. And more particularly this past year, he has been the official of the health and social affairs department in the province of Quebec in 99.9 per cent of the cases. He is the one who runs the errands, who helps out his constituents, who regard him as a worthy intermediary to whom they can go for help in solving their problems.

Just imagine, in a constituency like mine which is not the largest of the rural ridings, as Manicouagan is very much larger than mine but the mainland part of my riding is 180 miles long, it is sometimes difficult to drive 170 miles to go to the Magdalen Islands. If I have to go to the Magdalen Islands to meet my constituents, I have to leave from here, or if I am in Bonaventure riding, I have to go to Prince Edward Island which is hundreds of miles from where I live, or to Gaspé, to catch a plane that leaves when it pleases.

On the other hand a member for urban riding—I do not wish to minimize the role played by city members, for example Montreal or Toronto—finds it easier. On the contrary, it is to their credit, because they can effectively represent many more people than we can.

A member in the Montreal area needs only half an hour or maybe less to go over his riding so long as he does not call on each of his constituents. In my case, I could spend four days driving through my own riding and not visit a single home. Those are the difficulties of a member for a rural riding. The majority of hon. members represent very large rural ridings and I believe that if the commissioners apply the law too rigidly, we would have to amend it to allow the rural communities to be properly represented in the House of Commons.

I made representations to the Commission when it came to my riding; I could not personally attend its sittings but my colleague, the dedicated member for Matane (Mr. De Bané), whose riding will disappear if the Commission's report is accepted, presented my own submission to the commission members. We were told then: If you want this