

Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Suspension

much of the Senate, and I would be inclined to retire all the senators. But they tried at that time to bring in regional representation related to the United States system to which the hon. member for Crowfoot referred. They said there would be so many members from the prairie region, from the Maritimes, from Quebec, from Ontario, and so on. The other place has never lived up to the responsibility of giving regional representation, which supposedly was its task. It has been a most useless institution. It contains the greatest welfare cases we have ever had in this country from the time of drawing up the British North America Act.

I do not know exactly what the solution is to that problem. I suspect we could abolish the Senate and have more space for members of parliament. We could have representation by population so that there would be no need to do away with a constituency in Nova Scotia, Saskatchewan or Newfoundland. We would be able to increase the number of representatives those provinces have now, increase the number of members of parliament so they would be able to represent the people by election and not by appointment as a pay-off for duty well done to a government in Ottawa.

Therefore, I will support this bill on the basis of reviewing the general, over-all constitutional questions involved, but not in any way, shape or form in terms of any interference with the operation of the independent boundaries commissions which I believe are good and essential in principle.

Mr. Craig Stewart (Marquette): Mr. Speaker, I want to express my views on Bill C-208 to suspend the operation of the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act. I support this legislation. I might add that I have represented the constituency of Marquette since 1968, which was the first election under the boundaries that exist for this riding. In the redistribution of 1966 the land area of Marquette almost doubled in size. On January 22, 1973, the Electoral Boundaries Commission for the province of Manitoba announced its new proposals for Manitoba. Since that time I have received many letters from constituents in Marquette and other people in Manitoba expressing dissatisfaction with the proposals. I have also attended six meetings on redistribution in the riding since January 22.

Any Electoral Boundaries Commission dealing with redistribution has a very difficult task; it is impossible to please all areas of the country. However, I believe common sense has to be used. I have tried to obtain the reaction of the people of Marquette to the boundaries proposed and I say most emphatically that the present proposals are totally unacceptable to my constituents.

I feel it is most important that section 51 of the British North America Act be repealed and replaced by a new section in order to give recognition to area and regional representation of those provinces not protected by the senatorial floor to the extent that they should be. We believe it is most important that any committee set up to look into redistribution review this aspect completely. As an example, the province of Manitoba in 1941, with a population of just over 700,000, had 17 seats in the House of Commons. Under the proposals put forward this year by the Electoral Boundaries Commission, Manitoba which has a population of one million is to be reduced to 12 seats.

[Mr. Knight.]

In other words, in the last 30 years we have had an increase in population in Manitoba of well over a quarter of a million people, yet our representation in the House of Commons has been cut from 17 to 12 seats.

I want to list some of Manitoba's main concern regarding the present proposals. In the proposals, although the province loses one seat the commission has eliminated two rural ridings despite the fact that close to half our population still lives in rural Manitoba. I can see no reason for the rural areas losing two ridings. The redistribution act states that when you establish the population quota for a riding in a province you take the total population of the province and divide it by the designated number of seats in the province. In Manitoba's case, you divide 12 into the total population and the quota for a riding is approximately 82,000 people. The act states that because a metropolitan riding has a greater concentration of people it is allowed a tolerance of 25 per cent above this quota of 82,000. Because of the land area covered by most rural ridings they are allowed a tolerance of 25 per cent below the 82,000 quota.

The commission has completely disregarded the part of the act which provides that none of the rural ridings has to be above 65,000 population. The tolerance allowance was put into the act to protect the rural areas. The commission also seem to be assuming there will be the same depopulation of rural areas in the next ten years as there was in the last ten years. Most people feel there will be a levelling off and this trend will not continue to the same extent. In the proposals, only three ridings, Brandon-Souris, Churchill and Dauphin, do not touch greater Winnipeg. Of the other nine ridings, six are completely within the boundaries of greater Winnipeg and the remaining three border upon and enter the greater Winnipeg area. This means nine of our 12 ridings are connected to greater Winnipeg. This also means it is possible to have nine of the 12 members from Manitoba living in the greater Winnipeg area.

Another point I should like to make is that where possible we believe the commission should use natural barriers as boundaries. As an example, the northwest corner of the riding of Marquette has nothing in common with the riding of Dauphin. A large majority of the people in Marquette do not go to Dauphin once in ten years. In the case of Marquette, the majority of traffic moves in an east-west direction on the Trans-Canada Highway and No. 4 Highway. Between the cities of Brandon and Portage la Prairie there is very little traffic across the Assiniboine River. The proposals disregard completely natural travel patterns, trading areas and communities of interest.

We should also point out that Riding Mountain national park has over 1,200 square miles of wilderness. There is only one road across this park, No. 10 Highway, and it is controlled by the park authorities. There is presently talk that this highway may be turned into a scenic drive with a speed limit of 40 miles per hour, thereby eliminating all normal traffic.

In the proposed ridings of Dauphin and Portage, because of the way the population is evenly spread out it would be impossible for a member to give effective representation to these two new ridings because of their land area. Again, I mention the tolerance factor that is in the act to protect large rural ridings. At the time the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act was debated in the House of Commons,