

Electoral Boundaries

In July 1973, I pointed out to the hon. members in this House that the residents of the Kamouraska constituency were highly interested in keeping the name and the limits of their riding. Kamouraska is a geographical and a well structured unit with its county seat being St-Pascal; it has a private college in Ste-Anne de la Pocatière, an agricultural school, a CEGEP and, in St-Pascal, and well-know teaching institutions catering to hundreds of students.

A number of villages have ostentatiously celebrated their tercentenary. The novel by Anne Hébert was made into a motion picture entitled "Kamouraska". So it is a riding hundreds of years old which its population cannot disown. That is why its residents insisted and still insist on keeping the riding's name. Apparently the commissioners have taken those geographical and historical factors into account with the result that the name of Kamouraska has been maintained. However, the 1976 Report of the Electoral Boundaries Commission for the Province of Quebec has again some unacceptable mistakes.

The commission has not given enough consideration to the area of the territories and to the distinction which must exist between rural and urban ridings. This problem of representation has been pointed out on many occasions and facilities have been supplied to allow the people living at the far end of the riding to get in touch with their representative through secretariats which may be located in certain districts of the territory. However all efforts made to get in touch with people and advice them will be jeopardized by officials who are not aware of regional problems. It is obvious that the residents of rural constituencies have excellent reasons to protest against that attitude of those responsible for such a mess in carving out the electoral map.

A few years ago, the riding of l'Islet was amalgamated with the constituency of Kamouraska with the addition of some parishes of Témiscouata. At that time, the commissioners tended to amalgamate towards the west, while in 1976 the trend is eastwards. The merging of Kamouraska and Témiscouata is a hardly understandable blunder and the residents of Témiscouata have every reason to make representations to keep the name and the present boundaries of their electoral constituency.

As I often have the advantage of meeting constituents of Témiscouata, many of them have told me about the struggle led many years ago by the late Senator Jean-François Pouliot to preserve the riding of Témiscouata whose existence was then being threatened. That attempt to delete the riding of Témiscouata from the map has already been called a cyclical calamity.

Several representative groups presented briefs exposing the views of the citizens of Témiscouata. Many people are rather surprised to see that the commission does not seem to have taken them into account. It should be possible to group some 60,000 to 80,000 people into a riding without hopelessly carving out the electoral map.

Circumstances would allow it easily enough that I can quote an excerpt from an article published in the local newspaper *St-Laurent* on this cutting up of federal ridings in the province of Quebec. I quote:

The riding of Rivière-du-Loup-Témiscouata as it now stands forms an indivisible whole both historically and sociologically.

[Mr. Dionne (Kamouraska).]

It is most unfortunate that, at regular intervals, the task of redistribution, federal and provincial, should be entrusted to drawing room cartographers. The latter, in their ivory towers, shuffle the electoral boundaries, most of the time unaware of the geographic, social and economic factors that together create natural entities endowed with a very strong feeling of belonging.

It seems that these members of the judiciary, who are generally entrusted with the task of making the redistribution as a hobby, are not aware of or ignore the wrongs and the embarrassments they cause to the people of the ridings concerned by taking pleasure in moving them from one riding to another.

The respectable gentlemen should know that in man as in any animal there is a regional instinct which, when submitted to such arbitrary constraints as those imposed by the Electoral Boundaries Commission, generates deep frustrations, persistent resentment and quarrels between neighbours whose first victims are the people of the ridings concerned and, that, against their will. In addition, the people of Témiscouata have fought too long already to make a place for themselves under the sun for us to affront them by making them disappear from the electoral map. Such undeserved humiliation and punishment are totally unacceptable to people who suffer the cruelty of being refused an identity.

In the county of Témiscouata, such cyclical attempts to divide, disorganize, and destroy a natural unit are no less irritating than tragic, and that persecution must cease once and for all.

In the very heart of a well organized and homogenous area, that of Témiscouata, the Church has been the first, for more than half a century, to maintain a dividing line which, although invisible, still contributes to separate communities linked together by a common economic interest and normally destined to have between them just as close social relations. Well, it is that diocesan demarcation, safe for a few parishes, that some people want to impose upon us under the disguise of a suggestion, as a dividing line in Témiscouata, between the counties of Kamouraska and Rimouski.

To such a suggestion, we oppose a categorical no, and we reiterate that such a plan is stupid, unfair and totally unacceptable.

This illustrates the reaction of the people in the riding of Témiscouata to this attempt to readjust electoral boundaries on the south shore of the St-Lawrence River.

The representatives from the constituency council in Rivière-du-Loup had summed up in their submission the reasons for their representations. That is why the citizens of Rivière-du-Loup-Témiscouata are not accepting that decision, and the Electoral Boundaries Commission should wake up and try to be both consistent and fair. I hope that the decisions made earlier will be changed in a satisfactory way. It is not a matter of electoral advantage or disadvantage, it is a problem of fairness in the distribution of voters in each constituency of the eastern section of the province.

● (2150)

Mr. Rosaire Gendron (Rivière-du-Loup-Témiscouata): Mr. Speaker, unlike the Orientals, we do not have the qualities required to accept to commit hara-kiri with a smile. That is why a general outcry was raised against the decision of the commissioners to eliminate the riding of Rivière-du-Loup-Témiscouata.

It might be useful to recall that when the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act was introduced in this House, we were willing to prove our candor to such an extent that we did not want to let the government or the Parliament unduly interfere with the carving of the electoral map and we agreed to give the commissioners the responsibility for action, and to Parliament, merely the trouble of making representations.

It is all very good that we have been given the opportunity these last two days of making representations to the