

Electoral Boundaries

The member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) is delighted that the bill has no reference to the Senate or to senators. I suggests there should be such reference, because again one of the scandals of representation in this country is that the province of British Columbia has only six senators, the same number it had when it entered confederation. No increase in number has been made. While the number of senators serves for some provinces as a floor below which the number cannot go in terms of representation in this parliament, the Senate certainly has a very useful purpose.

I have the suspicion that certain provinces may regret it if this bill eliminates a reference to the Senate. I would suggest that the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre should use some of his great talent, erudition, experience and wisdom to suggests ways and means of altering that organization rather than to so cheerfully eliminate it, because in respect of the representation of the west we certainly do not want to lose six senators, and we would willingly have a considerable number more.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): We would be better off if we lost the whole works.

Mr. Johnston: I cannot agree with the hon. member in that comment as I still feel the Senate can serve some useful purpose. I feel we should discuss that purpose so we can continue to count them among representatives, particularly when we in British Columbia and the western provinces are shamefully shortchanged in representation.

There are simple remedies for some of the problems that exist in the other place, and one of the quickest and simplest would be to allow the provinces to name at least half their senators. I think this would have a marvellous effect and impact on that other place.

One thing we should remember when talking about population growth is that there is always a lag in redistribution, and we can see it developing again. The census is held in years that end with the figure one, that is 1961, 1971 and so on, but redistribution is seldom accomplished until the middle of what is the decennial census. So a province that is growing rapidly goes through one or two elections before the change finally comes; then there is another census and another lag.

On the other hand, the lag, of course, benefits the province that is losing population or that is growing slowly. For the province that is growing fastest of all the loss is important. Again this is something that needs to be considered when looking at the figures for the province of British Columbia, and they are not particularly generous.

There are a great many areas in which this bill can be opposed, and the party I represent is opposing the bill, not simply for the sake of British Columbia, but for a whole variety of other factors, some of which have already been mentioned. One is the extremely rapid growth in the membership of this institution as laid out in the bill, which may rise to over 300 very swiftly. Certainly I expect that many of us will still be around, if the proposal goes ahead, to see the day when the parliament of Canada will number over 300 members, and perhaps more than that.

I should like to concentrate in my remarks on areas that affect the province I represent. One must consider the

[Mr. Johnston.]

geographical factors in a province like British Columbia, which is the most mountainous of them all and which has vast areas that are scarcely mapped as yet. Because of the difficulty of communications links between other parts and the mountain valleys in which the residents live, they have built up their own distinctive character. If you link too many of them into a single constituency you end up with a constituency which is very difficult to serve, no matter who represents it.

I have the feeling that there is opposition to this bill from both sides of the House and from all parties that have representatives here from the province of British Columbia. I would find it strange if the hon. member for Skeena (Mrs. Campagnolo), the hon. member for Kamloops-Cariboo (Mr. Marchand), the hon. member for Comox-Alberni (Mr. Anderson), or the hon. member for Coast Chilcotin (Mr. Pearsall), could find much to support in this bill. I realize that not all those members are in the House this evening, but I am sure they must be concerned about this bill as they all have very large constituencies with all the problems I have mentioned in terms of transportation and communication.

The city of Kamloops is one of those areas that is growing extremely rapidly, and by the time we get around to the next election, if not around to the time redistribution is ready, it will in itself deserve one member without that vast hinterland that now surrounds it. The constituency of Skeena, which is larger than many of the provinces of this land, is another one whose growth will probably take off in spectacular fashion, and the representative from there will know what I talk about when I speak of the lag which comes from redistribution.

If one looks strictly at the mathematical table presented to us, one might be inclined to have some sympathy with the large provinces of Ontario and Quebec, and one might credit them with some restraint in the formula which sets their average constituency population figure higher if one did not know that the province which has the largest figure of all is British Columbia, especially when it moves into what is known as the large province category according to the table in the bill before us.

I think we should move with extreme caution in this regard as we must remember that the significant column of figures in the table is the one which shows redistribution under present rules. It shows that under the present rules the number of members from British Columbia would increase from 23 to 26. When the committee on privileges and elections was studying this during the last parliament, I was not a member of parliament—almost, but not quite. I regret that even more keenly now because I would certainly have liked to be here when the initial discussions on the amalgam formula were taking place.

● (2020)

If we look at the redistribution under the proposed recommendation we find the number for B.C. is 27. If we go back to the committee we see that the figure was 26. Somehow one seat seems to have been added in the interim. I suspect it has been added to forestall the criticisms of some of the members from British Columbia on that side of the House who have taken the time to see just what is in store for them.