

Redistribution Commission

Mr. King: "We have heard the last of Diefenbaker". That was interesting, because that was 34 years ago and many things have happened in the intervening time, and many similar predictions have been made. However, that is aside from what I am endeavouring to present to the committee.

With the purposes in mind that the hon. gentleman has indicated, there can be no argument. Over and over again we in this party advocated an independent commission. I am not going to clutter up the record by going back over the years and referring to the numerous occasions on which we advanced the concept of an independent commission. However, for the members who were not here in those days I would point out that there are several ministers now sitting on the treasury benches who in the early 1950's voted against there being an independent commission. But public opinion develops, and as a result of public opinion there today is unanimity that action in this regard should be taken.

There was one other matter to which the minister alluded and about which I wish to say a few words. He referred to the length of time it would take for this planned commission to be operative. Apparently he had not brought that to the attention of the chief organizer of the Liberal party, because hon. members will recall that a few days ago that gentleman was predicting that an election was just around the corner. The Secretary of State, who has a close acquaintance with the operations of the Liberal mind in this regard, has stated that if this plan is brought into existence he cannot foresee a general election based on redistribution before 1968.

Some hon. Members: Nineteen hundred and sixty six.

Mr. Pickersgill: Mr. Chairman, I am sure the right hon. gentleman misheard me. That was the suggestion, if there was one commission for the whole of Canada. I said that in implementing the proposals that are now being put forward, the earliest date I could foresee was the autumn of 1965.

Mr. Diefenbaker: I beg the hon. gentleman's pardon—the autumn of 1965. Again I say that apparently there was not liaison between the one who determines the date and the one who provides the ammunition for the next election for the government and the Liberal party. I do not think it will take anything like that length of time. We were in a position where we could not proceed with redistribution until the completion of the census. I could argue that at the moment, but I am not going to, by referring specifically to the statute in that regard. We proceeded as early as we could in 1962 with a plan for the setting up

of a commission independent of parliament in so far as political considerations are concerned. The following words appear in the January, 1962, speech from the throne:

My government will ask you to take steps to ensure that the forthcoming redistribution of electoral districts is made in an equitable manner upon an objective basis. To this end you will be asked to approve for the first time in our history a measure to create an independent commission to recommend the changes required in the electoral districts as a result of the decennial census.

There is, therefore, agreement in principle, agreement in objectives and acceptance of the principles that were enunciated by me in introducing an earlier resolution.

Now we come to a consideration of the terms of the commission. What kind of commission shall it be? We have taken the stand that a commission is difficult to set up unless it is in fact in large measure a judicial one. We have support for the stand taken in that regard on the part of Mr. Mackenzie King, who in 1933 suggested a commission of six judges from different provinces, three to be nominated by the government and three by the opposition. However, in addition to the judges—

Mr. Pickersgill: I beg the right hon. gentleman's pardon, but I did not catch the date of that reference.

Mr. Diefenbaker: It was 1933. That was during the discussion on redistribution. Those were the views of Mr. King, who was an experienced politician. In addition to that we felt that consideration should be given to adding to the commission the chief electoral officer and the surveyor general. We felt there should be one commission for all Canada, rather than a multiplicity of commissions for each and every one of the provinces. Indeed, the hon. gentleman himself said that he thought for a while what should be established was four commissions, representative of the four sectors of our country.

What were the terms that we advocated and which we still advocate? I very much appreciate the attitude taken by the minister in this regard when he pointed out that this is not going to be a partisan matter, that every consideration of partisanship is to be left outside this chamber in what we are about to do. He mentioned the chief electoral officer as a possibility for appointment to the position envisaged by this resolution. I personally have expressed, on more than one occasion, the view that Mr. Castonguay has discharged his responsibility in a way that is as unusual as it has been generally acceptable. There has been no suggestion at any time that in his many duties he has failed to preserve a complete and a towering neutrality.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.