

Electoral Boundaries Commission

because the minister has never heard that interpretation before, if the judiciary have not interpreted it that does not mean the interpretation that has been accepted for 10 or 15 years happens to be the correct interpretation. Nor did I submit in my argument that my suggestion was right or wrong; but I asked the minister a couple of questions. I said that as the members of the House of Commons at large are not being increased and as the members of the province of Saskatchewan are not being increased, what about the interpretation of that section? I think they are proper questions. I was not questioning whether the rule applied. It has been applied in the past, and will be in the future unless it is repealed.

Mr. Pickersgill: Mr. Chairman, the hon. gentleman should not get excited about this. I think he had a perfect right to suggest a new interpretation. The fact that everybody I have ever heard of up to now thought it meant one thing does not mean that it does mean that at all. The hon. gentleman may have made a discovery like Columbus did; but, you know, when Columbus made his discovery a lot of people were sceptical.

Mr. Knowles: Mr. Chairman, I wonder whether I could ask the Minister of Transport a question. My question is based on the very interesting observations made, particularly in the latter part of his remarks, by the hon. member for Winnipeg South Centre. When I refer to the "interesting observations", I mean his suggestion that consideration might be given to area representation or something of that nature, particularly in cases when provinces like Manitoba and Saskatchewan are called upon, under the rule as it now exists, to lose seats.

My question is this: Is the government considering or, as a result of the discussion taking place on this bill, would it consider asking the house to make the necessary amendments to section 51 of the British North America Act? I suppose that in effect I am saying to the hon. member for Winnipeg South Centre what has been said already, that the bill now before us is not one that makes changes or could make the kind of changes he has proposed. But it does seem to me that his suggestion should be given consideration, and perhaps the hopeful thing or the encouraging thing to come from the minister would be the assurance that this would be considered and that, if necessary, amendments to the British North America Act would be brought before the house, so that we could work out something of the nature suggested by the hon. member for Winnipeg South Centre.

Mr. Churchill: Mr. Chairman, I am very grateful for the addition to my remarks. I omitted to mention the fact that some of the things I was proposing were of course not strictly applicable to the bill and would require an amendment, as suggested, to the British North America Act.

Mr. Pickersgill: That is exactly the point I was going to make, Mr. Chairman, that the speech made by the hon. member for Winnipeg South Centre, and particularly his references to the English commission—and I use the word "English" because they are not applicable to the Scottish or the Welsh or the Northern Irish commission, but only to the English commission—would of course be very difficult of application under the present rules in Canada because, though the commissions are directed not to make the house too large, they are not restricted as to the ceiling. We are under the constitution of Canada, where the ceiling is set out in the British North America Act as amended, and nothing we could do within the ambit of this legislation could change that.

If it was the wish of the house that the constitution be amended to change the rules that apply in the constitution and to change the proportions between provinces, of course it is possible to do that. That has been done before; it was done, in fact, in 1952. I think there are some people who suspected me of being the actual author of rule 5, and I have never been able conscientiously to deny that I had some part in devising that rule. The feeling at that time that was shared by the whole house was that because of the war and the sudden and rapid shifts of population during the war—and we did not know whether they were going to continue—Saskatchewan did represent a special case. I would point out, as an old Manitoban—and I do not think either member for Winnipeg would disagree with me—that I would find it very hard, and I think even the members from Saskatchewan would find it very hard, to suggest that Saskatchewan should have more members in this house now than Manitoba, because it is well known that, though there was a difference of 5,000 in favour of Saskatchewan in 1961, it is somewhere about 20,000 in favour of Manitoba today. I think it would be rather repugnant to any of us, as rule 5 says, to give to a province with a smaller population a larger number of members than a province with a larger population. I would think at the present time one would feel very uncomfortable about having any difference under any rules between the representation of Saskatchewan and Manitoba.

But the matters that have been raised by the hon. member for Winnipeg South Centre, the hon. member for Bow River and one or