

Privileges and Elections

Castonguay in this field, and I think that the members of the various provincial commissions would agree that he rendered a distinct service to them in the last redistribution.

However, I think there is some point to the suggestion that perhaps the provincial commissions should be given the greater sense of autonomy which they might feel they would have if they were entirely on their own. I may say that this fits in with the view that I hold very strongly, that we took the right step when we went in for redistribution by independent and impartial commissions and I hope that we will do nothing to withdraw from that position.

It is because of that that I think if we can give to the provincial commissions more autonomy and experience, we will be more satisfied with the job that they do. I know that in one or two provinces there are grievances about what was accomplished at the last redistribution but I think by and large we have to admit that across the country a fairly objective job was done, particularly bearing in mind the principles that we set down, namely, a much closer approach to representation by population than we had under the old regime.

I listened with interest to the remarks made by my friend, the hon. member for Peace River (Mr. Baldwin), about the discussions that took place in the House of Commons during the course of the last map redrawing. I noted his reference to the fact that little attention was paid to those discussions. Speaking for myself, I hope the day will come when we do not have those discussions here at all, when sufficient confidence will have been built up in the independent commissions that we will not feel we have to have those discussions.

I am still of the view, as I know the majority of members are, that the drawing of the boundaries of our ridings is not our business, that it is the business of the people of Canada in some other way than through us, in view of our special interest. I recognize that it is difficult to make the shift, but I think we have taken the right step and I believe we can strengthen our confidence in this way of doing things.

I should like to conclude with a word of tribute to the decision that Parliament made back in 1963 after nearly 100 years of doing it the other way. I am glad to see this motion put before the House so that the committee can review some of the details of this operation. For my part, that is all I want to see, a

[Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre).]

review of the details. I do not want to see any derogation from the principle of redistribution by an independent body.

Mr. F. J. Bigg (Pembina): Mr. Speaker, I have just two very brief suggestions to make. I hope I am not being irrelevant when I suggest there is a need to take a good look at the armed forces with regard to this whole question. At present they have a choice of voting, but as I understand it the big error is that the voting is not secret. Surely in this day and age we can devise some way in which the armed forces of our country can have a secret ballot the same as anyone else. I hope that the committee when they consider this matter will be given sufficiently broad terms of reference to look into the subject and recommend to the government some reform in the voting of our armed forces.

I am glad the committee members still have an open mind on the question of redistribution. I think some gross errors were made at the last redistribution due to the fact that the preliminary steps were not made soon enough and that the recommendations from the right people were not put before the commission. I do not think that anybody knows the local situation better than the member representing the area. Although the commission must be independent, or as independent as possible, I think that a sitting member who has spent 15 or 20 years representing a riding would be an invaluable witness before the commission.

It would be a perverse commission which did not want to have at least his opinion. The fact that the member has been the choice of 75,000 or 80,000 people for 20 years should in itself be a sufficiently high recommendation so that his opinion would be worth something and should certainly not be neglected. I know in my own case that when Athabasca was redistributed, I could have given them one, or two hints which, if applied, would have better served the people, on matters such as unmarked roads, impassable river barriers, community of interests, and so on. Doing this would not have made any difference to me one way or the other. I think that any member who made a good representation on behalf of his people in order to give them better access to the polls and a better opportunity to be represented by people with a community of interest would risk nothing when it came to election time.

Mr. Les Benjamin (Regina Lake Centre): Mr. Speaker, I would like to make a few