

Electoral Boundaries

The residents of ridings characterized by a large proportion of recent immigrants have, by and large, established fewer traditional or formally organized means of transmitting political values or taking political action than is typically the case in more ethnically homogeneous ridings. Such formal arrangements take time to develop but they are, of course, the backbone of stable and healthy communities. On the one hand, broadly based citizen participation in the political process is vital to a healthy society. On the other hand, the structure of political culture in multicultural ridings is delicate and easily disrupted. I would therefore suggest, first, that wherever possible ridings such as Trinity not be subject to reorganization as this will inevitably disrupt the delicate balance of political participation that characterizes such ridings. Second, that when such reorganization is inevitable, it should be carried out with proper awareness of the social and cultural dynamics of multicultural ridings.

The concept of distance in rural ridings is well understood; the complex patterns of social and cultural distance and cohesion in urban ridings are less well understood. New Canadians generally have some difficulty in understanding the relative responsibilities of municipal, provincial and federal governments. In Ontario there has recently been a redistribution of provincial ridings. Now voters are being asked to adapt to yet another set of changes in federal ridings with a resultant breaking up of immigrant and minority groups who have worked together in a riding.

I am impressed with the arguments of sociologists who suggest that any move which increases the difficulty which members of ethnic groups have in voting or engaging in the normal political process decreases the group's feelings of participation in the life of their chosen country. Because of questions of communication and service and because of the arguments in favour of symbolic continuity, I would say that, ideally, ridings inhabited by a large number of new immigrants and a large variety of immigrant groups should be smaller than ridings with cultural homogeneity and a high proportion of native born Canadians.

But certainly there should be as much stability as possible in boundaries and in names of ridings which contain a large proportion of people who do not have a full command of one of the official languages. To change virtually all the boundaries in the ridings of greatest new immigrant density is to disrupt the symbolic organization of ridings and to increase the difficulties for new citizens of engaging in the political process. The higher the degree of continuity in boundaries and names, the greater will be the access to the normal political process of a large number of constituents in urban, immigrant-receiving ridings.

The need to service and represent the large proportion of new immigrant groups and the need for continuity to facilitate participation in the democratic process should receive priority consideration in redistribution. When we welcome as full members of Canadian society, with all the rights and responsibilities of citizenship, the thousands of people who each year become Canadians by choice, we have some obligation to be cognizant of the factors that make it easy or difficult for them to exercise their democratic rights and become truly and satisfyingly involved in the political life of their chosen country. The riding is the

[Miss Nicholson.]

vehicle, the medium by means of which information is carried and political activity—that is, constructive and socially useful activity—is made possible. If we are to expect a proper level of intelligent, political activity, we should alter boundaries and names as little as possible in immigrant-receiving ridings.

The views I have expressed this afternoon, Mr. Speaker, have already been expressed in one form or another at the public hearings which the commission held. It appears that, faced with the conflicting needs of rural ridings and very large suburban ridings, the commissioners have made their decision, which in the case of Toronto involves most change in the immigrant-receiving ridings. I do not really expect that at this stage the commissioners will redraw the boundaries for all of Toronto, but I do hope that, whatever further changes they do make, they will be cognizant of some of the particular difficulties of new citizens. I hope that some of the considerations that I have described may also be considered in future redistribution and balanced against geographical considerations and considerations of distance involved for rural ridings.

Mr. Sean O'Sullivan (Hamilton-Wentworth): Mr. Speaker, I wish to speak for only a few moments, together with other members from the province of Ontario and other provinces, as we deliberate the report of the commissioners for redistribution. I want to deal with the question of redistribution over-all and then to share the natural affinity of members in talking about our own constituencies.

● (1910)

On the question of redistribution over-all, I think it is very easy for us in this House to see the report come out, look at it and find all the things wrong, and then be harshly critical of the commissioners. I want at the outset to recognize that they have had a tremendously difficult responsibility. They have met it, and I think have met it as best they can. Certainly in respect of representations I have put forward and that have been put forward by citizens of the constituency of Hamilton-Wentworth, the commission has been responsive and has responded quickly. We only wish the commission had responded more favourably.

I think part of the difficulty stems from the constraints within which the commission has had to operate when looking at redistribution. In looking at redistribution we should be looking not just at the reports, the new maps or what will result because of what the commission has had to do, but also at the regulations under which the commission has had to operate. I suggest the regulations are inefficient and in many ways out of date. If the maps which the commission must redraw and the constituencies which they must redesign are out of date, then the commissioners should be given the tools with which to accomplish their task. We should give them proper and modern methods for bringing about more equitable redistribution of the constituencies.

For example, I want to deal with a specific guideline taken by the commission, and I take this from page 3 of the report for the Electoral Boundaries Commission for the province of Ontario, 1976. It says that chapter 25 provides that the commission may depart from such equality—