

Electoral Boundaries Commission

An hon. Member: Do you know you look like Red Skelton?

Mr. Woolliams: Well, I may look like him, but I haven't his bankroll.

Mr. Knowles: Mr. Chairman, while the hon. member is looking for his notes I wonder if he would entertain a serious question.

Mr. Woolliams: Yes, I would.

Mr. Knowles: That is an admission as to the last one. As the hon. member knows, all of us are concerned about the application of these senatorial floors, and some of us have some views about them in terms of what they do to the balance of representation. Is it not correct that for all practical purposes the provinces of western Canada have a floor of ten, in view of the fact that their population is greater than the populations of Nova Scotia and New Brunswick?

Mr. Woolliams: They have a floor of ten.

Mr. Knowles: Is there not a rule in section 51 which says that no province shall have fewer members than another province with lesser population? Therefore though by one part of section 51 our floor in the prairie provinces seems to be six because we have only six senators—as far as I am concerned that is six too many—in point of practical arithmetic our floor is ten, is it not?

Mr. Pickersgill: Yes, as long as the population of Saskatchewan remains greater than the population of Nova Scotia or New Brunswick. I just picked Saskatchewan because, though I think at the last census, Saskatchewan was slightly higher than Manitoba, I think now the population of Manitoba is higher than the population of Saskatchewan. But they are the only two provinces that seem in any possible peril at the present time. It would appear to me that the hon. gentleman is quite right and that ten is the practical floor for Manitoba and Saskatchewan.

Mr. Woolliams: I agree with the minister, and the only reason I raised the question of six was this. I said that if the rule was applicable to the west, then I agree with the hon. member's interpretation in that regard.

Mr. Knowles: I thank my hon. friend.

Mr. Woolliams: Thank you. I know that all of us have done some studying of this matter. I certainly am not by any means holding myself out as an expert, because this matter is pretty complicated, and needs a lot of research. I would say that members of the House of Commons who have been here for a considerable length of time, who have seen much of this legislation pass and have been

here at other times when we have readjusted the constituencies, have that experience which I do not enjoy.

I want to deal with several particular points that I have tried to make. First of all I say that to be fair to western Canada we must have a high tolerance. I know what the answer is going to be, and it can be debated. It is said that at the present time—and you can point a finger at us—we in western Canada have more Conservative members of parliament. But I would say this is supposed to be a long term or long time bill; the formula as to tolerance will probably change with changing circumstances. However, the fact is that we should forget about where the representation is from, and I say that western Canada will be discriminated against by the fact that Saskatchewan will lose four members.

Mr. Pickersgill: Mr. Chairman, I wonder whether the hon. member would permit a question. He says that western Canada would be discriminated against by the loss of four members. Of course the matter of how many members are given to each province is not in question in this bill, as the hon. member has recognized; it is governed by the constitution of Canada. Any discrepancy, therefore, between rural and urban representation would be within the constitution. Does not the hon. gentleman think that the discrepancies are far greater in eastern Canada, particularly in what he and I were brought up to call eastern Canada—I mean Ontario and Quebec—than they are in western Canada? I think the difference between Scarborough and Bruce is far greater than the difference between Calgary North and Bow River.

Mr. Woolliams: I agree with the minister, but as I pointed out earlier in my remarks, the discrepancy between York-Scarborough and other constituencies in Toronto is identical with the discrepancy with regard to Bow River, because the change must come within the whole of Toronto proper. I feel we should protect the people of western Canada and other people concerned in just the same way as the maritimes are protected by the rule to which I have referred. I believe the tolerance figure—particularly because we have so many rural constituencies—should be at a higher level.

I have said that I think we should take a careful look to see whether rule 5 can be interpreted in the narrow sense, whether it does or does not apply to a second occasion. I think also that we should be very careful with regard to the tolerance used in connection with large areas and rural constituencies. I have also mentioned the difficulty of getting around a large rural constituency in western