

situation that existed at that time was brought about by the fact that, even though the population of Canada had increased by 7.5 million between 1951 and 1971, the membership in the House of Commons had remained virtually unchanged. What was then to be done to provide a representation system that would reconcile the undoubted principle of representation by population with the particular requirements of the smaller provinces which have been treated differently in our country for a very long time and, at the same time, to acknowledge the pivotal role of Quebec in the representation system? The value of the amalgam system was that it reconciled, in a workable way, those three contending principles and it did give some breathing room, for example, to the smaller provinces.

I find it very hard to understand why it is that the government has made a proposal which will have the effect of removing ten seats from the Atlantic provinces, to which they are entitled under the present law, and which would be available to them, according to present projections, after the census of 2001. Honourable senators, that is just 15 years away and it is not a very long time in the perspective of a region or a country. Not only will the Atlantic provinces be frozen at their present level of 32 seats forever, but their clout, their proportion, their influence in the federal system will be reduced. That is if we believe that a member of Parliament is a source of influence, and I happen to believe that.

Therefore, honourable senators, I make reference to the case of the smaller provinces because their needs are ignored in this bill, whereas they were fully recognized, or at least attended to, under the amalgam method. After all, it is not as if the amalgam method, which we are now discarding on the recommendation of the government, was shoved down the throats of the House of Commons or of the Senate. The fact of the matter is that at third reading the bill was adopted unanimously without a dissenting voice; not on division; not under closure, but by the consent and willingness of the four parties which existed in the House of Commons at that particular time. It is true that at second reading there were some misgivings which were reflected in the vote, but when the bill received third reading, obviously whatever problems that had existed had been removed.

Honourable senators, there were some rather good parliamentarians involved in the arrangements that were worked out at the time, including Mr. Stanley Knowles, who represented his party in the deliberations and who said in his speech:

I think an arrangement has been worked out that should see us through a few decades, and I think it will be looked upon as an improvement over what we had.

Senator Flynn: That was in 1974?

Senator MacEachen: Yes, in 1974.

Senator Flynn: Up to 1994?

Senator MacEachen: The representative of the Social Credit Party, the late Mr. Fortin said, and I quote:

Mr. Speaker, I wish to congratulate the President of the Privy Council (Mr. Sharp) for having introduced Bill C-36 . . .

Generally speaking, our party is satisfied with Bill C-36. We are glad that the government accepted to propose, to use the so-called 'amalgam' formula which seems by far the best of all proposed formulas.

I agree with Mr. Fortin. It is the best of all the so far proposed formulas—and it is being rejected in this bill.

At that time, as I have said, there were four parties in the House of Commons and on third reading they all accepted the bill. There was no dissent and we proceeded with unanimity to its implementation. The situation today is quite unlike that situation. The New Democratic Party opposes this bill; the Liberal Party opposes this bill. The proposals of the President of the Privy Council, Mr. Hnatyshyn, have not received the consent of the two other parties in the House of Commons. In fact, in order to get the bill out of the House of Commons, the President of the Privy Council had to put the bill under time allocation or closure. That is my first point: The amalgam method as found in the present law was accepted unanimously. The method being proposed in Bill C-74 is opposed by the opposition parties and it has been put through by time allocation.

However, honourable senators, there is another point that must be addressed, and that is that when the dissolution of Parliament took place prior to the last election, the process had almost been completed. The commissions, under the existing law, had done their work. Their reports were before the House of Commons and were about to be debated. There was absolutely no outcry at that time from any party, that I can recall, against the system or about the number of seats that it would produce for any election subsequent to the 1981 census. Therefore, it comes to me as a deep disappointment that, with that background of general support, the government, on its own, following the election, saw fit to bring in a new system which, as I have stated, ignores the needs of the smaller provinces totally and freezes the representation of the Atlantic provinces for the foreseeable future, to the year 2001, at 32 seats when, under the present law, those four Atlantic provinces could grow, under the projections provided, to 42 members. The reasons given by the President of the Privy Council are not very convincing. I know it is more expensive to have a larger house, and he has given certain estimates of expenses. I do not think that that should be the decisive consideration, in view of certain expenditures made by the present government with which we disagree and which amount to billions of dollars. I take the example of the American Coast Guard vessel that went through our territorial waters without our consent while the Government of Canada remained silent. In order to recover the situation, the government subsequently committed itself to build a new vessel which will likely cost much more than the additional cost of the representation under the amalgam method up to the year 2001. I do not regard consideration of cost as a convincing reason.