

*Electoral Boundaries*

Two of the other provinces are considered to be intermediate in size—Alberta and British Columbia. The remaining provinces are of relatively small size, though even here a wide variation in population exists, ranging from Prince Edward Island with a population of somewhat over 100,000 to Manitoba with a population of more than a million. So there is a wide mix in our population setup. If all provinces were of equal size in the national sphere perhaps a really close representation by population formula could be carried out, Mr. Speaker.

● (1550)

I think it can be said for many westerners that they hardly regard themselves on an equal footing with the two central provinces in Canada. This is largely a matter of geography. They regard themselves sometimes as onlookers on the national scene. Similarly, and perhaps even more so, this feeling would hold true for the Maritime provinces. Of course the provinces of both Ontario and Quebec have large sparsely settled areas with different problems than those of the industrial areas, and those areas within those two provinces have their own grievances.

The study of this problem has been very interesting, and in many ways I think we should look, in the over-all matter—or perhaps some parliament in the future should—at what the Senate could be doing, as is the case in some parts of the world such as the United States, with an elected House, and in Australia with the equivalent of a Senate, both of which provide representation for regional interests. It might be that in the long run we should arrive at some means of reforming the Senate and making it another elected body in order to provide a better formula for redistribution.

In attempting to arrive at some sort of solution various formulae have been produced, and they all add up to the numbers game: how many seats should each province have? Some of this might be done away with if we had amalgamation of the Maritimes, say, or of the western provinces. Such a solution, perhaps helping in respect of redistribution, would have untoward effects, so such a solution would seem inconsistent at this time.

There seems to be a general feeling that the provinces should not lose seats, particularly in view of the fact that Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Nova Scotia would have their representation at their constitutional level, while other provinces such as Manitoba and Saskatchewan could well fall to a lower number of seats yet still have a larger population than the Maritime provinces. To obtain a change of this nature would require a drastic review of the British North America Act, with provincial acquiescence to changes in the constitution.

For this present redistribution it seems that most members would favour the proposed new general rules. These are in effect that no province should suffer a decrease in Commons representation. I am sure this would find general support among members. Secondly, no province shall have fewer seats than a province with a smaller population. This, and I think it goes without saying, would be quite an undesirable event. Thirdly, no province shall have an average constituency population greater than that of Quebec. It is interesting that, in this regard, we are

[Mr. Ritchie.]

returning to some extent to the 1867 act under which Quebec was the principle that governed representation of the provinces from 1967 to 1947. Perhaps there is historic irony in respect of this situation in our debate on the resource bill, in that we are returning to the principle espoused and passed on by the fathers of confederation.

I think it is less certain that members will want to see an automatic increase of four seats for Quebec after the 1981 census and, of course, a corresponding increase for the larger provinces. Based on present population growth this would mean increasing the size of the House substantially with each decennial census. I think it is here that many members would part company with the government and would like to see the House of Commons of 1983, or at whatever may be the proper time, pass judgment as to whether it wished to continue enlarging the House in this manner.

There are many reasons why there should be a maximum, so that the members of the House at any time will be able to pass judgment easily on whether the House should continue to be enlarged. I do not think it can be fairly said that there is great reluctance or reservation by members on all sides of the House to express themselves in respect of whether it would be a good thing to discontinue enlarging the House of Commons. At the present time it seems that enlargement of the House would create no actual physical problems, and the actual structure of the House need not be altered to accommodate the increase in the membership proposed by this bill.

Indeed, during the question period many members might like to have even fewer in the House than at the present time, and many would point to the Senate of the United States which has only 100 members to represent its 200 odd million people; not that I would equate the Senate of the United States with the House of Commons, but it does indicate a substantially fewer number of representatives.

The United Kingdom parliament has 600 members, but the United Kingdom has no equivalent number of provincial members to carry on much of the function that is carried on by our provincial members here. I would also hasten to add that, contrary to what some in Ottawa might think, Canada could not function without provincial governments representing the regions of our country.

I also believe that there is in this bill the suggestion that Quebec will remain as the pivot for the computation of the number of seats for the larger provinces. This is a return to the principle of parliamentary representation from 1867 to 1946. In the treatment of categories of intermediate provinces and small provinces the Quebec pivot has been greatly altered, and does not function nearly as well as it did in 1946.

The small provinces would be determined by dividing their population at the most recent decennial census by the average constituency population of all the small provinces at the time of previous redistribution. In no way will this tie the representation of the small provinces, populationwise, to the larger provinces.

Should this amalgam method go unchecked there could arise a situation whereby a small province or provinces could experience phenomenal growth. For instance, the