

Electoral Boundaries

namely, the 11 seats eventually granted by the commissioners, would in effect not need to take place.

It was, therefore, with a great deal of anticipation that I awaited the new commissioners' report after the amendments to the constitution which increased the total number of seats in the House. Thus, you can imagine my consternation and dismay when the commissioners again reduced the number of seats from 12 to 11, although the total number of seats in Ontario was increased from 88 to 95. In effect, southern Ontario was given another eight seats; northern Ontario, covering 80 per cent of the total land mass in Ontario, had its seats reduced in number from 12 to 11.

I was not alone in my disappointment, Mr. Speaker. Not only did the commission reduce the number of seats, but they did not provide for protection of community of interest. We were caught in the position where the commission, prior to the public hearing was saying, "We can only provide you, in northern Ontario, with 11 seats, not 12". We replied that the commission had to keep the 12 seats in northern Ontario, so they said to us, "What would you rather have, the community of interest protected so that the people who are represented by one MP are attached to their representation in terms of logistics, communications, community of interest, social development, and so on; or do you want 12 seats?" We said that we wanted both, Mr. Speaker, and they gave us neither. They did not give us community of interest nor the 12 seats, and we are caught between hell and high water.

It is very unfortunate that this happened because I think northern Ontario has not changed in its make-up. It is still a typical example of how the power of parliament and the power of representation is evolving toward urban areas, where urbanization is taking its toll of members of the House. Because northern Ontario has a huge land mass but a relatively small population increase, it is being relegated to the position of second importance. There is no doubt in my mind that the representations which were made to the commissioners ought to have been listened to by them. When the initial report tabled in August, 1975, came out, I insisted that my communities have an input in order to make known their representations.

● (1750)

When the commissioners came out with their report, they cut off the whole northwestern portion of my riding. Coming from highly-developed areas in eastern Canada where populations are present in every segment of the province, you are not aware of the size of northern Ontario or how disjointed the populations can be. There is a section of my riding, namely, River Valley-Field, the townships of Springer and Caldwell, which are traditionally part of my riding but are now being put in with the district of Timiskaming which stretches between Moosonee, that northwest passage so sought by Champlain in 1615, and Highway 17, some 900 miles to the south. I am looking at the hon. member for Timiskaming (Mr. Peters), and I know the only way he is going to service that riding is by paddling a canoe up the Oricana River, down to Lake Timiskaming and down the Ottawa system. He is taking over a portion of my riding in the northeast, as well, that can only be serviced via Lake Timiskaming and the Ottawa River, or Highway 63 which goes through my riding.

[Mr. Blais.]

An abortion of that nature is not deserved by the citizens or the electors of the district. I know the hon. member for Timiskaming is a very able representative, and I am not speaking of that at all. I am saying that this does not stand any scrutiny, having people within 40 miles north of the centre of my riding served by someone who is centred some 60 miles by water and a 120 miles by road. Nor does it stand to reason to have someone in River Valley, which is serviced by Highway 539, served by someone who is 120 miles away over really rough roads. If you have seen the neglect of the Ontario government vis-à-vis highways in northern Ontario, you have seen nothing until you travel between Highway 11 up River Valley to Glenafton and in that area. Not only did the commission cut off that particular area but it cut in half two townships in my riding. The southern halves are left with me and the northern halves are going up to Timiskaming.

I received a letter from the Corporation of Field Township which I should like to put on the record.

[Translation]

It is in fact a letter which describes specific problems faced by people who now belong to an area with which they have no link, no historical relationship whatsoever. I was sent this letter dated March 23, Mr. Speaker, and I quote:

Dear Mr. Blais:

The municipal council of the township of Field has learned with bitterness and great consternation the decision made by the federal Electoral Boundaries Commission. We are strongly opposed to this decision to divide the western part of the Nipissing constituency. We expressed our views on this matter in a brief submitted to the commission last fall.

We are still insisting on cultural, economic and community relationships that link together the five municipalities of West Nipissing. The new proposed division would have disastrous effects on our region. The citizens' reactions to this decision are in support of our request for reconsideration of this adverse decision and we hope to come back to a status quo, in the best interests of the community of West Nipissing.

Sincerely yours,

Roger Lafond,
for Dr. N. Patenaude,
Municipal Prefect.

Mr. Speaker, that is exactly the fear felt by these people not to be incorporated in the area that can best serve them. No matter how able their member of parliament, these people are concerned by regional and geographical unity.

I also received a letter from the Association of West Nipissing Municipalities. This association groups all the small towns of the western part of my riding. They have acted together and succeeded in making changes that are quite remarkable by taking their decisions together.

I will therefore read two paragraphs of their letter dated March 15:

[English]

We have now received a final report of the commission, dated February 27, 1976, and to our surprise and bewilderment, the West Nipissing electoral district has been guillotined, half of West Nipissing will be taken over by the district of Temiskaming.

The members of our association are very displeased with this decision, and the implications are far reaching. In fact this proposed division not only divides the few municipalities in two distinct districts, but certain townships are divided in half. We are at odds to find any logic in this decision.