

*Redistribution—Mr. Ralston*

times has an opportunity to grow and fill up its vacant lands. We are not, I agree, filled to saturation, but Prince Edward Island is pretty well populated; it has forty per square mile; Nova Scotia has over twenty-four, so that we are coming towards saturation for a province which is rural rather than urban. Before long I believe the necessary procedure will be taken for an amendment to the British North America Act providing that the minimum be increased.

Hon. members will say: Well, that was in the pact of confederation; representation by population, is, after all, the rule by which we go. I would point out to the committee that that is not so; that Manitoba when it came in in 1870 had sufficient population for one member according to the unit of representation at that time, but it did not get just one member; it got four. Population was not considered as the deciding factor in the matter of representation. In 1881 Manitoba had a population sufficient for three members and it was given five. Prince Edward Island in 1873 had a population for five members and was given six as one of the terms of its coming into the union. British Columbia is perhaps the most outstanding case. When it came in it had a population of 40,000. It got six members although as a matter of fact that population, according to the unit of representation at that time, would have been given only two. In 1881 British Columbia had a population entitling it to two members and again it got six. Further than that, as hon. members know, an express provision was inserted in the Imperial order in council admitting British Columbia, that it should never have less than six members. Therefore, I submit to the committee that population has not been the exclusive yardstick at least with regard to provinces entering subsequent to confederation.

What I am pointing out to the committee is this, that the minimum which was provided in 1914 is not adequate, not fair, not a proper minimum having regard to the importance of the maritime provinces in confederation. I realize that one cannot altogether alter the basis of representation, but I feel this committee and the country will consider and consider sympathetically a suggestion that the maritime provinces should have the representation which they had when they came into confederation, or at least a fair and adequate minimum at least comparable with their status in confederation and their economic and geographical importance.

Mr. BENNETT: That would give 85,000 people five members in Prince Edward Island.

[Mr. Ralston.]

Mr. RALSTON: Yes, I know, and I say I am not tying myself to any definite number at the moment; the number is a matter for consideration. I am endeavouring to show that in the matter of representation as it stands at present we are facing the possibility of a reduction to ten members perhaps the next time, and that that is not adequate representation for either Nova Scotia or New Brunswick. Let me read just one paragraph from a speech that was delivered by Sir Robert Borden, then Mr. R. L. Borden, in this house in 1907, as reported at page 2202 of Hansard. He was speaking to a motion which was made by Mr. Hughes, a member from Prince Edward Island, to the effect that the maritime provinces should be entitled to a minimum representation based on the number with which they came into confederation. First of all he speaks of the Australian system, and points out that in Australia they provided in the constitution itself for an irreducible minimum. He says:

This—

Referring to the Australian system:

—is a direct illustration of the principle which has been contended for by my hon. friend from King's and by every hon. gentleman from the maritime provinces, and it seems to me that it would not be going too far to comply with the principle, and it would not be too much for this government to take immediate action—it might well have taken action before this—to consult the other provinces as to whether or not there would be objection to a proposal of that kind. I am inclined to think that the larger provinces would answer a question of that kind very much in the spirit which the Prime Minister himself has expressed and would be inclined to give the three maritime provinces, whose population has not increased so rapidly as that of other parts of the dominion, representation which should never be smaller than at the time when those provinces entered confederation.

Sir Wilfrid Laurier, speaking on the same occasion, gave utterance to very much the same sentiment. He said, as reported at page 2199 of Hansard of 1907, volume 2, that this is a matter in which we can afford to be generous. He said:

For my part I say without hesitation that this is a matter in which we can afford to be generous. Even if the balance of representation by population be not absolutely and minutely kept, even if Prince Edward Island or Nova Scotia or New Brunswick should have one or two members on the floor of this house beyond the number provided by the original constitution, the granting of such excess of representation would perhaps be a gracious and generous act and one which would redound to the benefit of confederation. But this house ought to hesitate in passing judgment until it has before it the views of all the provinces affected.