

Electoral Boundaries Commission

I did not mean the same chief electoral officer there, but the chief electoral officer in each province in which there is one.

But quite frankly, apart from the chief justice of the province or a judge designated by the chief justice of the province—and here I must say I was very much influenced, as I think were others to, by the Manitoba precedent—it did not seem to us that there were any other persons we could designate who would have the same title and position in all provinces. In any event, what we really wanted was to be assured of impartiality.

After various other possibilities were considered the government finally agreed to put in the bill the suggestion that the chief justice of the province should nominate the chairman from a member of his court; that the leader of the government, the Prime Minister, should nominate one of the members of the commission; and that the Leader of the Opposition, who is an officer of parliament, should nominate the other. I say unreservedly that I have every confidence that no matter who occupies those offices, any person who becomes leader of the opposition in the parliament of our country or prime minister in the parliament of our country would take this responsibility seriously and make the kind of nominations that all of us would feel were appropriate under the circumstances.

I repeat that statement unreservedly.

I do not hesitate to say that with respect to this provision or with respect to any other method which commends itself to the house or to a majority of the house and which seems likely to produce as fair and effective a result, the government will be quite prepared in committee to consider on its merits any amendments to this procedure.

Now, that was the position at that time. I do not believe I need to read the next paragraph, which relates to the representation commissioner, but I should like to read the following paragraph on page 742.

Frankly, sir, up to now this is the most satisfactory suggestion we have been able to think of for arriving at the composition of these commissions, but I hasten to say again that if anyone in any quarter of the house can produce a better method we have an open mind. It is, I say once more, not the special responsibility of the government but the responsibility of all of us to do this in the best possible way.

That has been the position that the government has taken throughout about every aspect of this bill, and which it continues to take about every clause in the bill. It is true that last night I expressed quite strongly my personal preference for the ten commissions, but I would not have considered there was any question of confidence involved if the house had decided to take a different position, so long as I felt it would be workable. That is the position I have taken throughout, and which I continue to take with respect to every clause in the bill.

Now, sir, in the course of debate the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre, as recorded at page 762 of *Hansard* for March 10 last, the same day, took exception—as did

[Mr. Pickersgill.]

members in other parties in the house aside from our party and the party which represents the official opposition—to any of the nominees being the nominees of leaders of political parties. It is apparent to everyone that the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition are leaders of political parties. I am sure they are not ashamed of that fact, but personally I do not think, in the discharge of the responsibility suggested by this bill, they would act in that capacity. I think they would act as responsible citizens performing duties entrusted to them by parliament, if parliament decided to entrust those duties to them.

But I also recognize that it is not unnatural for members in other parties to feel this way about it, and perhaps I would feel the same way if I had the misfortune to be in one of the smaller parties.

Mr. Knowles: You will be one day.

Mr. Pickersgill: If I had that misfortune I might feel the same way as hon. gentlemen did in all three groups in that corner of the chamber, when they expressed themselves about the suggestion in this bill.

Mr. Woolliams: You mean political misfortune.

Mr. Pickersgill: The hon. member for Bow River has an engaging way of trying to put me off my argument, but I wish to read what the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre said. I think he will not disagree with my paraphrasing of it, when I say he did not think this was the most satisfactory way. He suggested that we should follow the course in Manitoba, which I might say parenthetically is precisely the same or as nearly precisely the same as two things can be, as the course followed by Mr. Frost when he had the commission established in Ontario. If my recollection serves me right, in Ontario it is not the chief justice. It is one of the high court judges, with the chief electoral officer, and a professor in the political science department of Queen's University. So in effect the Ontario commission would really conform more precisely than Manitoba to what is suggested in the amendment offered by the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre.

Mr. Woolliams: Would the minister permit a question? I know he is padding something, and I was wondering if he would now say whether he himself and his party are in agreement with the amendment moved last night.

Mr. Pickersgill: I would like to make my argument in my own way, as I know the hon.