

*British North America Act*

can look forward to action by this government to give effect to the wishes and ideas of the Prime Minister.

It is important that we get going on this matter as soon as possible because four years come along very quickly when you are dealing with something like redistribution. In 1867, as most of you probably know, the basis for deciding how the representation was to go stemmed from giving Quebec, which was neither the largest nor the smallest of the provinces, 65 seats. There was emphasis at this time that the division should be along county lines and it was found, in the discussion to be found in the old *Hansards* in the statements of Sir John A. Macdonald and other leaders of the times, that the principle of representation by population both between provinces and within provinces should be to the fore. Actually it was definite as between provinces but the act is silent on how it was to be adjusted within the provinces.

In order to prevent any one province from taking a real beating in the readjustment after each centennial census there was the one-twentieth clause inserted in the British North America Act which provided that the provincial ratio to the national population from one census to another, if it did not drop more than one-twentieth, would not lead to the loss of any members. This provision, of course, protected some provinces. The general idea up until 1872 and the first of the John A. Macdonald gerrymanders was that the government should bring down any changes and those changes, of course, came in when British Columbia and Manitoba came into confederation. Manitoba was given four seats although it only merited by population half a seat. British Columbia was given six seats though it only merited one. Hence representation by population went out the window. In 1873 Prince Edward Island came in and it was given six seats where it was only entitled at the time to five seats. Unfortunately for Prince Edward Island, it never got the assurance that this was an irreducible minimum whereas Manitoba was promised that the four would be a minimum until 1881 and British Columbia was promised that the six would be an irreducible minimum.

So by 1873 you see representation in the House of Commons on three different bases. There were the four original provinces which had roughly "rep. by pop." with 190 seats. Then you had the western provinces. They were guaranteed ten. Then you had Prince Edward Island that had six but was guaranteed none.

When Sir John A. Macdonald began to operate in the 1872 redistribution he did not

give the opposition any opportunity really to consider the changes that were made. They were brought down and presented in the house as government business and the opposition, with much raving and ranting, had to accept them. The storm and fire was even more severe in 1882. This has been referred to as the great gerrymander or, as some people call it, the best gerrymander, when the Grits were really hived. Sir John A. Macdonald came out with a couple of statements that shot the principle of representation by population to bits. He said that representation by population from province to province was fine but within the provinces, because of county lines and town lines, there should be different interests looked after. Classes and localities should be represented and the principle of members according to population should not be the only one. So with 1882 you begin to get the development of the great discrepancy. You begin to get development of the idea that the rural voter is worth more than the urban voter.

As you hon. gentlemen must be aware, the Conservatives stayed in power until the 1892 redistribution when the Liberals first brought forward from opposition the idea that there should be an independent commission. Sir John Thompson who was the Prime Minister at the time for the Conservative party injected a completely new principle into dividing up the seats. That principle was to do nothing. He said that you should only interfere with representations in those districts where increased population had to be provided for. In other words, you kept the status quo unless a place had developed so much, say in the west, that you gave them another constituency. So you get with that attitude even more the development that the rural constituency remains the same, the larger urban constituency grows, but no provision is made for it and this tends to become a maxim.

One of the arguments brought forward at the time by the Conservatives was that rural members of parliament at the time usually lived in town; for example, most of the members from rural Quebec were not from the rural areas. They were lawyers or solicitors or advocates in the city of Quebec or in the city of Montreal. Therefore the cities really had better representation than you might think. One of the other arguments was that in the city the people were more alert and lively and that therefore they needed less representation. Furthermore they were easier to reach. They had more educational media available to them and the press