

Electoral Boundaries Commission

Mr. Pickersgill: I was hoping that the Prime Minister would deal with some of the points which have been raised, particularly with the question of the fundamental conditions which it seems to me ought to be observed with regard to this bill, above all, whether this parliament is going to decide on the commissioners or whether the government has any thought that the commissioners are to be appointed by an order in council which, I think, would be completely unacceptable.

There is really no reason why this scheme of the bill should not be exposed at this stage. There is no sanctity about this. I can remember that being done on many occasions when the right hon. gentleman was on this side of the house. Sometimes it was resisted by the government, and they gave way afterwards. I thought it was a foolish point to make in the past, though sometimes it was done because the bill was not quite ready, even under the previous government. If this bill is ready, I hope the Prime Minister can indicate, as I say, whether parliament will decide who the commissioners are going to be or whether the government has in mind to do this by order in council.

Mr. Diefenbaker: Mr. Chairman, I would simply say this: the rules are that I cannot deal with the bill in the committee stage of the resolution. We have heard the views of hon. gentlemen on the subject and if they would allow the resolution to pass now we would make great progress, because the bill would be before the house and the country immediately and be available for consideration in detail. Each hon. member would then have the fullest opportunity to make his suggestions.

I have listened with much interest to the various statements which have been made, and the views expressed, but the principle before us now is the setting up of an independent commission, and from what I gather from the opinions expressed by representatives of all the parties, that principle is accepted. This being so, in order to expedite consideration of the various questions which have arisen I hope there may be acceptance of the resolution. When that is done we shall immediately table the bill. First reading will be given at once and in that way an answer to a number of doubts expressed will, I think, be forthcoming.

Mr. Pickersgill: I am not going to enter into a sterile argument about whether or not the right hon. gentleman can tell us what the scheme of the bill is. We have had that point over and over again in the house. Even if there were some technical objection, if everyone wanted it there would be no harm in doing it. I am not insisting on that point nor will I waste any time on it.

[The Chairman.]

The Prime Minister said the principle we were to settle was whether there would be an independent commission. That, of course, is not correct. What we are determining here in accordance with the government's request is whether it is expedient to introduce a measure. The principle of a bill is determined on the second reading of the bill, not on the resolution. The question we are asked to settle here is whether it is expedient to introduce this bill. I think it would have been expedient to introduce a bill of this kind in 1960, as I indicated when I spoke earlier. I think it would have been excusable and perhaps expedient to do it in 1961. I do not think it is expedient to do it in 1962 unless we have an assurance from the government that it intends to proceed with the implementing of the redistribution itself; unless, in other words, we are assured that this legislation is going to come into immediate operation and that the constitutional obligation to redistribute is going to be carried out during the lifetime of this parliament. Otherwise it seems to me it would be more expedient to be dealing with urgent legislation that obviously has to be passed before there can be an election.

If we are not going to implement this in any way, if it is not going to have any effect upon the next election, then there does not seem to me, using the word "expedient" in its ordinary sense, to be any kind of urgency; and since urgency has been stressed so much by the government in recent weeks I do not feel we should proceed with this measure now. If the session goes on longer and the supply which is urgent business is voted, supply to pay bills that were contracted in the last fiscal year the passing of which is our fundamental job in parliament—

Mr. Diefenbaker: Perhaps the hon. gentleman would allow me to give an answer to these various matters immediately.

Mr. Pickersgill: Certainly.

Mr. Diefenbaker: To begin with I would say we could not set up a commission in advance in order to assure that redistribution would be proceeded with any faster than will now be the case.

Mr. Pickersgill: Well, that is a matter of opinion.

Mr. Diefenbaker: Redistribution cannot be proceeded with until the census is completed, and the census is not completed yet. To have set up a commission for the purpose of giving consideration to what it would do after the census was completed would have been idle and futile, so that the question as to whether it should have been introduced in 1960 or 1961 is, I think, an academic argument.