

Redistribution Commission

said that, I am not undercutting my argument—

Mr. Pickersgill: I was just going to point out the hon. gentleman is pretty illogical. He argued for a low population in Port Arthur and a high population in Prince Edward Island. As the sponsor of this legislation I want to make it very clear I am not in favour of interfering with the senatorial floor which protects the maritime provinces. I think my suggestion that I am not in favour of it, that I am in favour of maintaining the constitution in that respect, is a responsible position, although I was accused by the hon. gentleman of irresponsibility.

Mr. Fisher: I am glad to know that the minister is prepared to accept this kind of responsibility. He is probably aware I was pretty sure he could not or would not do anything other than what he has just done. But not enough people in this country who will be considering the problem know about the Senate floor. Most of them are unaware of what it does to the beautiful logic of the representation by population argument.

The increase in the number of members in this house will again not compensate relatively for these areas that have the Senate floor. I do not think we should complain about the Senate floor very seriously, but I wish everybody would recognize that unless we plan at some future time to make some kind of adjustment to it, that will be satisfactory to those areas that are supported by it, we will get greater and greater discrepancies as shifts take place in the population of Canada.

There was one other point I wanted to touch on in relation to the commission, and how it would plan to operate. I have always felt that judges, despite their great reputation for fairness and impartiality, are not always the people with the best backgrounds to bring to this kind of problem. I would take it from what the minister said in his opening remarks that the technical assistance in terms of population, mapping, and that kind of thing, will be available to the commissioners, particularly to the chief commissioner, but that assistance will not really find representation in the person of anyone.

I have always felt that a geographer or demographer should find some representation on the national commission, and when I say representation I mean as a person. I would like to ask the minister whether this was considered at all, or whether it was felt that the chief commissioner would embody in himself all that kind of knowledge and expertise. I do not know whether he is in a position to give me an answer at the present time, or whether he wishes to, but I would like to know if this matter was considered.

[Mr. Fisher.]

Mr. Pickersgill: I think this could be better considered when we have the bills before us.

Mr. Fisher: One other thing I would like to mention in connection with the commission is the fact that in the major provinces there is such a difference, in the stretch say, from northwestern Ontario down to the Ottawa valley, particularly in terms of any intimacy of knowledge; so that I do not feel you can really make a great thing out of the argument the minister put forward, that to have a single commission for a province would allow this type of thing. I do not know how you are going to get representation on a commission in Ontario that is really knowledgeable in the sense of understanding the traditions of a riding, something about its population, its economy and its transport hookups, and one might even say the social-political watersheds of various areas in a province that size. That is why the argument the minister used, to take away the idea of a commission to represent the three prairie provinces, seemed to me somewhat insubstantial. I think that the argument I am applying to Ontario is the one he applied to the prairie provinces.

I think if the situation exists in Ontario, where we will have a commission that really is not that informed in any intimate way about the province, then the same thing could apply quite easily to the prairie provinces.

There is another point which may be irrelevant but, in view of all the commissions we are creating, are we going to be able to staff them properly? We have not heard from our friends in the corner about whether the French speaking interest is going to be protected, but I assume they will speak on it. And are we going to be able to get such population representation in a hurry? It is for that reason, while I agree with my colleague from Winnipeg North Centre that we accept and support the idea of a multitude of commissions, I still have a tendency to feel we could probably do with three or four rather than with 10.

I have enjoyed the opportunity of speaking on this topic, which is so familiar. One of the things about its familiarity is that it is balanced with the complexities, so that one tends to forget more than one learned last year. One might say it is a wonderful bag of tricks, and a cave of exploration for almost any hon. member in the house. I am sure, from the non-partisan way in which the minister introduced this, that the response he will get in the house will be a very generous one, and I know other hon. members probably look at it the same way I do—looking forward to days and days of discussion here, while we give him all the suggestions in that