

so-called "sacrifice" in permitting a reduction in its present seat allocation in a weakened Senate, the premiers were persuaded to give Quebec and Ontario many more seats in the powerful House of Commons where the real power is. The sales line in central Canada now is, "The Senate is now a paper tiger. We have taken its powers away. The real power is in the House of Commons."

Of course, they are right. Early in the negotiating process, Ontario's Premier Rae called for a "generosity of spirit" on the part of all people sitting around the negotiating table. That "generosity of spirit" inspired him to demand and receive 18 new Ontario seats in a strengthened House of Commons in exchange for an 18 seat reduction in the new, weakened and almost powerless Senate. Premier Harcourt of British Columbia said, "It was only fair; it was 18 for 18"—18 Senate seats for 18 extra Commons seats for Ontario. Predictably, Premier Bourassa was offered and accepted a similar reward to assuage his feelings of anguish about losing 18 of his Senate seats.

As an unexpected bonus Quebec would receive a guarantee that, whatever happens to Quebec's population in the future, that province, with Canada's lowest birth rate, would always have 25 per cent of the House of Commons membership. It is a bonanza that no province could refuse.

Is there anger and concern in British Columbia? There certainly is. British Columbia has been under-represented in the Senate for years and has been offered no such compensation. Indeed, the first version of the constitutional package would have reduced British Columbia's share of Commons seats. The only province in Canada with an initial percentage reduction in Commons representation also happens to be the fastest growing.

In the hockey world the kind of selfless Ontario-Quebec sacrifice of their precious Senate seats in return for compensation in the form of a handsome number of new seats in the House of Commons would be something like trading three Pee Wee league hockey players for Wayne Gretzky, Eric Lindros and Mark Messier.

The naivete of the premiers' concession to Canada's largest two provinces boggles the mind. Yet Premier Harcourt flew back to the West Coast, figuratively clad only in a barrel and waving a piece of paper saying, "I have achieved peace in our time". Under cross-examination by media people, Premier Harcourt wasn't quite sure just what had been achieved for B.C.

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At a later press conference, he was hard-pressed to convince British Columbians that Charlottetown was anything but a disaster.

It was it was proposed initially that there would be six new western members in the so-called "reformed" House of Commons, four from British Columbia and two from Alberta. A promise of a further three British Columbia seats has now been made to lessen the sense of outrage and injustice felt on the west coast. Unlike, however, the 36 Ontario and Quebec

bonus commons seats, their electoral impact will not be felt until the year 2003.

Under the proposed redistribution in the House of Commons, Quebec would be allotted one member in the House of Commons for every 74,000 Quebecers, or 93 seats. Good for them! But, on that scale, British Columbia should get 44. Under this proposal it gets only 39 and Premier Harcourt originally agreed to only 36. Alberta should get 34, but the shrewd Premier Getty quarterbacked Alberta to only 28 seats. The four western provinces together should get 106 seats. They actually get 95, scarcely enough to compensate for the fact that we have 1 million more people than Quebec. Therefore, the west will initially suffer an under-representation of 11 seats, enough to decide an election. But Quebec also gets that guarantee of 25 per cent of the House of Commons seats, regardless of its population. So, as its population proportion declines, the under-representation of the west will only worsen.

Needless to say, the premiers of the two most westerly provinces have been introduced thoroughly and painfully to the considerable negotiating skills of their central Canadian counterparts aided and abetted by the office of the Prime Minister.

Unfortunately, the Senate proposal in its present form may only serve to widen the gulf between western Canada and central Canada. The troubling fact is that the 18 extra House of Commons seats proposed for Ontario alone total more than Manitoba's entire House of Commons allocation of 14 seats. Central Canada's total of 36 new House of Commons bonus seats would be eight more than the 28 House of Commons seats now held by Manitoba and Saskatchewan combined. So much for enhancing western influence in Parliament and so much for Premier Rae's "generosity of spirit".

Will it be an effective Senate? Only one type of bill could be killed by the Senate: Legislation changing tax policy on natural resources. There are no federal taxes on natural resources now, so that "power" is really meaningless and irrelevant.

As far as other tax measures are concerned, how would senators explain to the people who elected them that they have no power at all over the taxes which the government wants to impose? Incredibly, all money bills would have to be dealt with in 30 days by this new so-called "reformed" Senate. If not, this joint assembly of the House of Commons' members and senators decide by a majority vote. The government majority of 337 House of Commons' members would be able to out-vote the 62-plus senators under almost all circumstances. A myth? Listen to these figures.

Using the percentage of seats held by the eight majority governments elected since 1949 and extrapolating from those figures, assuming a 337-member House of Commons and a 62-member Senate, at no time could 60 per cent of the senators opposed to legislation have defeated the majority government in a joint sitting of the two houses. No wonder some