

Electoral Boundaries Commission

take the time to examine this bill very carefully. One does not like to be continually apologetic, or on the defence, but again let me say I am not approaching this matter on a partisan basis at all.

I have been trying to make a serious study of this situation. Twelve years ago I came to the conclusion that in the light of the history of redistribution in this country we should accept the fact that we cannot get strict representation by population, desirable as that might be, and that we should allow for area or regional representation as we already do in the case of the Atlantic provinces. I direct the attention of the committee to the fact that area representation or regional representation for Manitoba and Saskatchewan might be the answer to this particular problem. It is difficult to forecast population trends accurately. I tried to do so 12 years ago, and when I look back at my records now I see I underestimated the trend. But I did foresee the increase in population in Ontario and Quebec and the loss of seats in some of the other provinces.

It appears at the present time, however, that the increase in population in the central industrialized provinces will go ahead faster than in the Atlantic provinces or in the prairie provinces, though the population is increasing at a good rate in Alberta and British Columbia. While I am suggesting consideration of regional representation in order to avoid too great a discrepancy between two very important areas of our country, I am at the same time suggesting that this will not change the balance of power in the House of Commons. I would not necessarily restrict the increased representation which should properly go to those areas of Canada where the population is growing very rapidly. I do not advocate at the present moment a large increase in the membership of this house. That might be a mistake. At the same time, I dislike seeing a decrease in the representation of important areas of our country. This is why I am satisfied that there should be no further reduction in the representation of the Atlantic provinces.

I think it is to the advantage of parliament to have the representation we do have from those provinces. I think it is important to Canada's economy to have spokesmen here in Ottawa who can interpret the special condition of the Atlantic provinces and represent the views of their people, so that in the economic contest which goes on constantly the interests of the Atlantic provinces shall not be neglected, as could happen if their representatives were outweighed in numbers.

The same considerations apply, I submit, to Manitoba and Saskatchewan. A population increase there might not keep up with the

[Mr. Churchill.]

national average. We are not predominantly industrial societies, although we are making giant strides in that direction. We shall continue along with Alberta, to be great primary producers of agricultural products. The point of view of this region requires expression here in the House of Commons—I am sure no one will deny that this is the case—and I believe its representation should not fall below what is the present total for that region.

Members of the House of Commons represent not only people; we represent the interests of an area, and economic factors. I know we say we represent everybody in our constituencies, but there are a lot of people there who wish we did not represent them. With the division of this country into ten provinces we speak from time to time with a united voice on behalf of our own provinces, even though we may belong to different political parties, and I think this provincial representation is a factor which should be taken into account.

I believe my time is running out, Mr. Chairman, and I put these matters before the committee in the hope that we may take our time over this bill. I do not mean we should stretch our considerations out for weeks, or anything like that, but I hope we will not attempt to rush it through, that there will be plenty of time to consider the subject, and that if we are able to make certain amendments we shall put ourselves in a position where the disparities presently obtaining in Canada may be considerably reduced. I close on this note—that we should look at the British experience with regard to the tolerance figure which they wiped out. We should consider approaching representation by population while at the same time remembering regional representation.

Mr. Woolliams: I wonder if I might rise on a small question of privilege. I am sure the minister would not wish to leave an incorrect impression as a result of his intervention when my hon. friend from Winnipeg South Centre was speaking. During my argument I made it clear there was no question but that section 51(5) applied on the first occasion. There was only the question whether it applied on the second occasion, the subsequent occasion. The minister left the impression that I said it did not apply at all. I am sure he did not mean to leave that impression.

Mr. Pickersgill: No, Mr. Chairman. All I meant to suggest was that the hon. gentleman had suggested an interpretation of this clause that I had never heard before; that was all.

Mr. Woolliams: If I may just finish on a question of privilege, Mr. Chairman; just