

the parliament of the United Kingdom to effect an amendment to the British North America Act with respect to readjustment of the representation in the House of Commons.

Mr. J. G. DIEFENBAKER (Lake Centre): Mr. Speaker, I shall not read the resolution, because it is before you. There are great and vital issues facing this country to-day which require solution by parliament. There are questions having to do with the burden of taxation, with food, with housing, and with labour which may very well not be considered at this session of parliament because of numerous other matters that are being brought before parliament at this time.

In 1943 the Minister of Justice (Mr. St. Laurent) said that the debate might very well give rise to differences of opinion that might cause serious divisions in this country. If that is so, the debate will be a long one. Many Canadians believe there is no reason for adding to the membership of the House of Commons at a time when expenditures should be decreasing rather than increasing. Opinion is widespread in this country that since we have now waited for several years for redistribution the matter might well be postponed until 1952, because it will have to be considered again in that year. I do not intend this afternoon to deal with these phases of the matter.

May I at the outset say a word on behalf of the prairie provinces. In 1943 when the Minister of Justice brought before the house a resolution for an address to amend the British North America Act, he pointed out, as reported on page 4337 of *Hansard* of July 5 of that year:

It is argued on behalf of Manitoba and Saskatchewan that some of their population has been drained away as an effect of enlistments in the armed forces and of a drift from certain portions of those provinces to war plants in Ontario and Quebec or British Columbia. As to the men who enlisted, though efforts were made in taking the census to credit all these men to their own respective provinces, it undoubtedly did happen that some of them had changed their homes since enlistment, and there is no doubt that a great many had changed their homes to go to war plants in other centres. It can be argued that these provinces should not be penalized because of these facts, but to make a redistribution at this time and not to make it along the lines above indicated would require an amendment to the constitution.

The Minister of Justice stated also in 1943 that—

The effect of employment in the production of munitions of war was to remove large numbers of the population from their homes to reside temporarily in other parts of Canada. If it was unfair in 1943, as it was, is it not equally unfair to-day? A census is now

[Mr. Mayhew.]

being taken in the western provinces, and it may show a return to those provinces of residents who left for war services in other parts of Canada; yet the redistribution is to be based upon the census of 1941, which the Minister of Justice said in 1943 would be an unfair basis.

Let me point out that between 1931 and 1941, having regard to the natural increases in population, Manitoba lost 48,478 persons; Saskatchewan, 157,545 and Alberta, 41,841. If the 1946 census establishes that that population has returned, those provinces would be entitled to the representation they would have had had the people not left. They would therefore be penalized by this measure.

It is not with this phase of the matter, however, that I intend to deal particularly on this occasion; it is rather with the broader aspects of the constitutional issue involved in the amendment to the British North America Act as contemplated by the resolution now before the house. It has a much broader significance than the mere matter of redistribution. But I wish to deal this afternoon not with the fairness or unfairness of the provisions of the resolution or the desirability of achieving a greater measure of representation by population, but rather with the method employed by the government to secure an amendment to the British North America Act.

One of the most consequential provisions of this resolution is the proposal to amend section 51 without consultation with the provinces which will be affected.

Some hon. MEMBERS: Oh, oh.

An hon. MEMBER: Duplessis.

Mr. DIEFENBAKER: I appreciate the attitude of my hon. friends. When they speak I am courteous enough not to interrupt, and I ask them for the same consideration unless there are questions that they wish to ask.

The material subsections of section 51 of the British North America Act are as follows:

(1) Quebec shall have the fixed number of sixty-five members;

(2) There shall be assigned to each of the other provinces such a number of members as will bear the same proportion to the number of its population (ascertained at such census) as the number sixty-five bears to the number of the population of Quebec (so ascertained).

(4) On any such readjustment the number of members for a province shall not be reduced unless the proportion which the number of the population of the province bore to the number of the aggregate population of Canada at the then last preceding readjustment of the number of members for the province is ascertained at the then latest census to be diminished by one-twentieth—