

Electoral Boundaries

The people in that area live in closer contact than in any other district of the city of Montreal. I feel strongly about this and I dare hope that the commissioners would be sympathetic towards my recommendation. If they do not accept to change the boundaries of the riding as I said earlier, I would recommend it be named Saint-Henri-Westmount since it cannot be named Saint-Henri anymore because they took out certain parts from that riding. The Saint-Henri district stops at Atwater Street and my western boundary is Atwater Street. Therefore, for those reasons, I hope that the commissioners would agree to my proposals and, in concluding, I would like to thank them for the work they have done.

Mr. Adrien Lambert (Bellechasse): Mr. Speaker, following the federal election of 1968, when I first came to this House it was subsequent to a redistribution. The result of these new boundaries was to delete the ridings of Dorchester and Montmagny. The Eastern part of Quebec was losing, by the same token, two representatives from a rural sector. The new Bellechasse riding results from the implementation of the 1964 legislation.

The changes which were brought about in 1968 caused reactions which are easy to understand. As a matter of fact, the Dorchester riding had a long history of which its people had every right to be proud. In the riding of Montmagny, there was a similar response. People from this ancient riding recall proudly of their fiery nationalist member, Armand Lavergne, who left his mark not only in the House of Commons but in the Parliament of Quebec as well.

For eight years now Mr. Speaker, I have attempted as a member to bring together the people from the various areas in the new riding of Bellechasse, and when these efforts are starting to show some results, the new distribution completely changes the limits of the Bellechasse riding.

I have carefully studied the report of the Electoral Boundaries Commission for the province of Quebec. I am quite sure that the Commission did its best to distribute our ridings in an equitable manner however the fact remains that this report contains certain inequities which affect both the people from rural areas and the representatives from rural ridings. This is why I have tabled in the House my objection to the provisions of the report, which has been signed by nine of my colleagues in the House and I take this opportunity to thank them wholeheartedly for their collaboration.

The question of electoral boundaries has always prompted many discussions in our country. In fact, as far back of the Union Act of 1840 the people from Ontario thought it fair that their province as well as the Province of Quebec should have an equal representation. At that time, the province of Ontario or Upper-Canada was in a minority situation in terms of its population, in contrast with the situation of to-day. We have to say that representation by population, was to take place in Ontario as soon as its population would exceed that of Quebec, especially as a result of immigration.

The British North America Act passed in 1867 provides that the representation in the House of Commons shall be based on population as established by an official census

taken every ten years. I think that the quota should be established at the national level and not at the provincial level. Lastly, we could adopt a percentage of plus or minus adjustments establishing the population of urban ridings let us say at 100,000 people and semi urban ridings at 80,000 and rural ridings from 50,000 to 60,000. This formula would facilitate a better balance in the representation of rural and urban population.

As our province is getting more industrialized and since industrial centralization tends to reduce rural population to the benefit of urban centres it is more imperative than ever to maintain the present number of representatives in rural areas otherwise their number will get very low. The governments have always been concerned with maintaining the quotas even between 1882 to 1900. The authorities were much concerned with this issue and they followed the principle by which they took into account riding boundaries as well as town and municipality boundaries regardless of the effects it could have on the size or shape of the riding.

● (2020)

In 1882, we find that the electoral quotient obtained by dividing the number of the Quebec population by 65 is 28,908. On the other hand, there were two ridings where the population varied between 6,000 and 9,000 another had a population of 45,000 and 36 others, a population of 21,000 to 24,000.

Sir Wilfrid Laurier and Sir John Thompson agreed on this subject. They were saying that urban electoral ridings were already over represented since the rural areas members came mostly from urban areas and represented to the House of Commons people from urban areas as well as the people of their own electoral district. How right they were!

There was a time where a general election provided many professionals from the cities the opportunity to go to rural areas in search of a seat, then they would come back to the city after the elections to live there until the next one. Fortunately, this mentality has changed and the rural areas are now in a position to elect someone chosen among themselves to represent them in the House of Commons.

Mr. Speaker, many changes were made between 1882 and 1964 concerning representation. However, the present redistribution is conducted according to the law voted by Parliament in 1964. It seems that the members of the commission have applied section 13 to the letter but have not taken into account subsection (c) which states:

The commission may depart from the strict application of rules (a) and (b) . . .

—of section 13, in any case where special geographic considerations, including in particular the sparsity, density or relative rate of growth of population of various regions of the province, the accessibility of such regions or the size or share thereof appear to the commission to render such a departure necessary or desirable, or any special community or diversity of interests of the inhabitants of various regions of the province appears to the commission to render such a departure necessary or desirable. And lastly, the 25 per cent tolerance, higher or lower, has not been used as far as the eastern area of Quebec is concerned. There are now 10 ridings covering the area from Thetford