

Redistribution Commission

maps and statistics took about a year before the Manitoba commission was able to operate effectively. I cannot help but feel optimistic, seeing the general agreement in the house and knowing the preparatory work has virtually been completed, that we can have redistribution before another election.

Mr. Aiken: Mr. Chairman, the discussion to date has been conducted on a very high plane. We all seem to be tending towards an impartial commission, but I think all of us are trying to make sure it is impartial in our favour. It is the old story of us all being equal but some being more equal than others; and I get the feeling from the discussion we have had that we want to make sure we are all dealt with equally, and that the coming redistribution does not end up with some being more equal than others.

It is very difficult to assess the expediency of adopting this resolution without having before us fairly complete particulars of the electoral boundary commission proposals. Actually we are discussing the resolution for a representation commissioner, and it has been agreed we can discuss in general the question of redistribution. I think that the really basic part of redistribution will be found when we eventually come to it in the bill which is in the name of the Secretary of State, providing for the establishment of electoral boundary commissions.

Some of us have wondered why the Secretary of State put this bill on the order paper as a bill for first reading, when normally it would be required by resolution. He has explained to us that in the bill he intends to introduce there will be no provision for payment of public expenses and therefore it will not be a money bill. But we are involved in two difficulties. The first is that we are discussing a resolution on one bill which will depend upon another for its final implementation. We are going to have two statutes. If we pass the resolution we are now concerned with, and do not pass the electoral boundaries commission bill in the same form in which the government presents it, then this may cause some very considerable difficulties.

What the Secretary of State said about redistribution was more significant for what it left out than what it included. It included the title of a bill, and I suggest that if he had introduced the bill on electoral boundaries commissions by resolution it would have more particulars in it as to what we were considering, and we would not be dealing merely with the title of a bill and its general intentions. I think we are working under considerable difficulties, and the Secretary of State was not very clear in setting out the criteria under

[Mr. Moreau.]

which the electoral boundaries commissions would act when they are set up.

However, we have to decide what is before us, and that is whether or not it is expedient to adopt a resolution to appoint a representation commissioner, and to bring in a bill in general terms along the lines of that resolution.

We have first to consider what are the real fundamentals in redistribution, and number one among these is the basis on which seats are to be added or altered. We ought to know the population and geographic content which is to be used in setting up each riding. We ought to know how many people, on an average, are to be included in a riding, and the percentage by which the commission will be authorized to deviate. That is basic to this type of bill and it has not been given to us yet. We are left in considerable doubt about the real fundamentals on which the government intends to redistribute the electoral seats.

The second thing we have to be sure of is that the job will be done in an objective and non-partisan way. I think that the intended nomination of the chief electoral officer as representation commissioner will be accepted by everyone in the house, but under present circumstances he will merely be a co-ordinating person and not the person by whom final decision is made. Therefore at this moment we do not have any assurance of equal, objective and non-partisan redistribution below the level of the one person who is well known to this house.

Third, we need some assurance that redistribution will be carried out equally in all provinces. This is one of the shortcomings of the proposal for 10 commissions because, unless the criteria are set down very carefully, each of the commissions could very well be operating on a different basis. Representation in the House of Commons is not a provincial matter. The number of seats in each province is set down in the British North America Act. The manner in which representation shall be made from each province is not. We believe we should have equal representation across Canada. It might very well be that in one province greater stress will be laid on urban ridings and less on rural, and in another province completely different criteria will be used.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, I think we should be told before we pass the resolution—and I do not believe we have been told—whether it is really the intention of the government to increase the number of seats. I was under the impression that the number of seats could not be increased without an amendment to the British North America Act or a special statute of the parliament of Canada, but I