

Privileges and Elections

I might mention a number of questions and invite the committee's consideration of them because I know they have been of concern to the Representation Commissioner and to the people who have been considering his role. The first is whether the office should continue to be separate from the general electoral system or—and I say this by way of a suggestion—perhaps it might be desirable to have the office of the Chief Electoral Officer with over-all jurisdiction, and have the Representation Commissioner as an autonomous division under the general jurisdiction of the Chief Electoral Officer.

Under the provisions of the redistribution legislation the Representation Commissioner is required to prepare preliminary maps on the basis of which the various provincial commissions set about carrying out their particular studies. Some question has been raised as to whether this role has been a useful one. Perhaps it has been useful in some provinces, and in the larger provinces like Ontario and Quebec it may have made a significant contribution to the job done there.

The question has also been raised as to whether it is useful for the Representation Commissioner to continue to be *ex officio* a member of each provincial commission, and whether in fact in order to carry out the functions of each commission it is necessary that he work along with them. A response to that argument might be an affirmative one, that in a sense the Representation Commissioner provides a continuity between all the representation commissions and brings to them some of the general consideration and experience gained across the country. On the other hand, however, it must be borne in mind that the provincial commissions are independent, and the provincial representatives are in a majority and are not bound to accept the recommendations of the Representation Commissioner.

Having set out these points, I shall go no further. I hope the committee will look fully into this matter. I think it is valuable to have the committee examine at this time the role which has been discharged in a particularly distinguished way by Mr. Castonguay. The committee will have the opportunity to hear Mr. Castonguay and other interested persons. Then we would hope the committee will make a recommendation to the House in time for it to be included as part of the Elections Act amendments, or perhaps in time for it to be dealt with in the latter part of this session or early in the next session.

Mr. G. W. Baldwin (Peace River): Mr. Speaker, I have very little to say on this question. As the minister has pointed out, what we are doing now is what is mandatory under the provisions of the act. I only hope the committee will take a fair, honest and objective look at the act and its operations as a result of the last election.

I would urge the government to struggle desperately against its natural inclinations and be equally objective. Hon. members will recall that under the act as it was originally passed, after the various provincial commissions had made their inquiries there was an examination and discussion in the House. One or two fairly technical changes were made, but if I recall correctly, some very genuine objections were voiced in this House by members and unfortunately nothing was done.

As I say, I hope the representations made in committee will be made honestly and seriously and that there will be the objective, non-partisan approach by all hon. members that obtains when elections are involved.

When the results of the committee's considerations are brought to the House, if the proceedings are carried out in the way I have pointed out I hope the government will accept them. We will wait until the committee has had its deliberations and then we will probably make further comment on the matter.

Mr. Stanley Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, we are pleased to support this motion for a reference to the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections. As the previous speakers have indicated, we are only doing something we are called upon by statute to do. Indeed, I found interesting the way the President of the Privy Council (Mr. Macdonald) was able to explain that when the statute says we should do something in the first session after 1968, even though we are in 1970 he can say that this is the first session after 1968. I suppose it is his legal training which makes it possible for him to put it in those terms. At any rate, it is being done and we are quite happy to support the motion.

• (9:20 p.m.)

I think it has to be said that the three principal questions which the President of the Privy Council mentioned are serious questions that must be looked into by the committee. It may well be that in each of these three cases changes should be made. No one can deny the invaluable service of Mr. Nelson