

Electoral Boundaries

Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton): Will the table be incorporated in the text of the hon. gentleman's speech?

Mr. Sharp: It was my intention to recommend that it should be printed at this point in my speech.

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

[Editor's note: The table above referred to is as follows:]

Representation of the Provinces in the House of Commons

NOTE: THIS TABLE DOES NOT INCLUDE THE SEATS OF THE YUKON TERRITORY OR THE NORTHWEST TERRITORIES

	Present	Redistribution under present rules	Redistribution under proposed new rules	Application of present rules to redistribution after 1981 census*	Application of proposed new rules to redistribution after 1981 census*
NEWFOUNDLAND—(522).....	7	6	7	6	8
PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND—(112).....	4	4	4	4	4
NOVA SCOTIA—(789).....	11	10	11	10	12
NEW BRUNSWICK—(635).....	10	10	10	10	10
QUEBEC—(6,028).....	74	72	75	68	79
ONTARIO—(7,703).....	88	91	95	94	110
MANITOBA—(988).....	13	12	14	11	15
SASKATCHEWAN—(926).....	13	12	14	11	14
ALBERTA—(1,628).....	19	19	20	20	23
BRITISH COLUMBIA—(2,185).....	23	26	27	28	32
TOTAL.....	262	262	277	262	307

(Population for 1971 in thousands).

*This is based on a projection obtained from Statistics Canada of 23,967,800 in 1981.

Mr. Sharp: At this point, I should like to remind hon. members that the bill deals with the question of redistributing seats in the House among provinces, and that it does not encroach in any manner on the task of the independent electoral boundaries commissions in readjusting the boundaries of constituencies within provinces. The two processes are quite distinct. Nevertheless, it will be appreciated that the allowance of small increases in the size of the House, and the protection of the existing representation for each province as a minimum guarantee, will ensure that attention may be paid by the commissions to maintaining the historical, social and geographic patterns of constituencies.

The bill does not contain provisions respecting the representation of the territories. In recognition of the very special factors affecting the adequacy of their representation, the government intends to introduce at an early date, after this bill has become law, a separate bill to increase to two the number of members to be elected from the Northwest Territories. The government does not intend to recommend changes in the representation of the Yukon territory, which has a much smaller land area and approximately one half the population of the Northwest Territories.

Hon. members will recall that the electoral boundaries commissions will complete the determination of constituency boundaries throughout Canada based on the results of the present method of redistribution, if parliament does not act to adopt a new method by December 31. May I suggest, therefore, that since there is general agreement that the existing method of redistributing seats is not satisfactory to any of the parties in the House, the bill before us should be referred promptly to committee so that it can be examined in detail.

On the basis of informal discussions and consultations, and of the work of the committee in the last parliament, the "amalgam method" does seem to be the most acceptable of the various alternatives which have been put forward, but the new committee and this House should be satisfied that such is the case. The first step is for the

committee to look at the alternatives and make a report. As I said at the beginning of my remarks, this is a matter which rises above partisan politics.

Mr. Gordon Ritchie (Dauphin): Mr. Speaker, in considering the bill before us we are, once again, contemplating a measure which would alter the basic electoral map of Canada.

Historically, this has been done at frequent intervals—almost every ten years. Reading the debates which have taken place on this subject it is interesting to note that those taking part in them believed they were making maps which would last forever and a day. I think we should remind ourselves, when studying this bill, that the map we eventually propose will almost certainly be changed after the 1981 census, and that it will certainly be changed after the 1991 census. All human beings are fallible, no matter how well we may think we are doing.

Members of the previous parliament spent a good deal of time discussing the changes they thought should be introduced, and the manner in which various provinces might be affected. I think it can be said that legislation such as this is relatively nonpolitical. After all, each member has a personal view as to the nature of the constituency he or she represents, and the way it fits into the general plan.

The issue we are considering today reflects a feeling among many members of parliament that their constituencies contain more people than they adequately are able to represent and, conversely, a feeling among rural members that with the change in the population mix they are responsible for looking after vast areas of sparsely settled country.

There is, too, the difficulty of ensuring adequate provincial representation in this chamber. Canada contains two provinces which are relatively huge in terms of population—Ontario and Quebec. These two provinces exert a great influence on the affairs of our nation. We tend to think they extend a long way to the north. In fact, though, the population is strung out in a narrow band along the United States border.