

Electoral Boundaries Readjustment

I suppose I should add that it is harder because of the very great stability of our people. They are not a mobile people. They have got used to one set of electoral boundaries. We have only had two elections since their introduction, and now we find that there is to be a major boundary change.

I, myself, or whoever will succeed me in representing the constituency of Fundy-Royal, will find that there is no city focal point. The constituency of Fundy-Royal will have as its focal point, according to the proposal of the commissioners, the Saint John river, and will be practically totally suburban; that is, it will take in the suburbs of three of the cities of New Brunswick, namely, Fredericton, Saint John and Moncton and, as well, include Canadian Forces Base, Gagetown. As I see it, the problem for whoever represents the people of the constituency will be that he will have no focal point, as has been the case in Fundy-Royal previously, centering on the city of Saint John and the problems faced by that city. I think this is a fact of life. People are moving to the cities, and we can see this happening all across our country.

I know that many members who will want to follow me in this debate will make their own specific representations and recite their own preoccupations with respect to signing the notice under section 20 of the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act. I merely wanted, on behalf of my colleagues who are unable to be here today, to raise the matter and say that, so far as many of us are concerned, the proposed changes are not satisfactory.

● (1750)

[Translation]

Mr. Eymard Corbin (Madawaska-Victoria): Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to take the floor after the distinguished member for Fundy-Royal (Mr. Fairweather) who is this year celebrating, I believe, his twenty-fifth year in politics, and who certainly possesses a wider experience of politics in New Brunswick than I do. I completely endorse the remarks he has just made to the House.

Of course, Mr. Speaker, it is impossible in the few minutes we have to put forward complete and substantial arguments as to our reasons for opposing the report of the Electoral Boundaries Commission for the province of New Brunswick.

Mr. Speaker, in politics an hon. member must sometimes stand alone against adversities, controversies and arbitrary decisions. I have been told that justice is blind, I even believe that the blindfold which covers her eyes also blocks her ears at times. In any event, Mr. Speaker, we should today debate the opposition—we have no choice, for there is a time limit for doing so—to the report of the Electoral Boundaries Commission for the province of New Brunswick.

You will remember that I was one of the ten hon. members who, in accordance with the provisions of the act, had submitted a formal opposition to this commission's report. I would have hoped that a larger number of members from New Brunswick would have dealt with this matter tonight. Some of them, who would otherwise have spoken, cannot be here, and I believe that the hon. member for Fundy-Royal and myself are acting as spokesmen for

[Mr. Fairweather.]

them by making remarks which we want reported in *Hansard*.

It may be the result of a professional quirk, or because there is a tacit agreement, but a member does not meddle into the affairs of another riding, and he keeps other hon. members from debating his objections. In any event, today we rise and insist on having *Hansard* record our deep dissatisfaction with the report of the commission.

Let there be no misunderstanding, Mr. Speaker. We question the judgment of the commission, though we highly respect its members. The act allows us to appeal the decision of the commission in this House. It is often said that the House of Commons is the highest court in the land. It is important that I should explain this publicly because some of the members of the commission and some citizens of the province of New Brunswick did not understand why I did not appear before the commission when it had its public hearings at the end of 1972 and early in 1973. The reason is very simple: I had major surgery performed in December, then convalesced; this kept me from appearing before the commission to express my opposition and suggest a compromise. Simple! Under better circumstances, I would certainly have performed my duties as representative of the interests of Madawaska-Victoria at the House of Commons.

Anyhow the result was the proposal we are discussing today based, it seems to me, on nothing else than a mere arithmetical question. The effect, as far as I am concerned, would be to incorporate into the electoral constituency of Madawaska-Victoria parishes which are now in the constituency of Carleton-Charlotte, more to the south, namely the parishes of Aberdeen, Kent, Peel, Wicklow as well as the incorporated village of Florenceville.

At first sight, especially for someone not familiar with the area, its geography, its inhabitants and their wishes, the proposals could seem logical somehow. But, Mr. Speaker, maps have never been logical. Everything we see, everything we find on them is arbitrary. Except for the fact that the new constituency thus formed would include almost half of the St. John valley in New Brunswick, both ends of the enlarged constituency of Madawaska-Victoria would have nothing in common with one another, and the people living in those two ends are as different as an Indian from India can be from a Canadian Indian. And this is not said in a disparaging sense, Mr. Speaker, for the visit of the distinguished Prime Minister of India to the House of commons yesterday is still fresh in my memory and besides, there are two Indian reserves in my constituency.

The exercise undertaken by the commission in attempting to mix in such a way water and oil was futile and the proposal that is being made does not stand on anything, I think. I am coming to the point but before I should like to deal a little with the historical background. The first inhabitants of the upper St. John valley were Indians; the first white settlers were Acadians, the sons of the great dispersion, of the "great upheaval", who came towards the end of the 18th century. Madawaska's birth-place is in Saint-Basile, where will be celebrated this summer the centenary of the arrival of the Hospitalières de Saint-Joseph and, as I said recently in the House, that of the designation of the provincial county of Madawaska.