

*Electoral Boundaries*

of the region, some 60 per cent of the land mass, indicates to me that there has to be a more reasonable division of the seats allocated. At present, two seats represent almost all that 60 per cent. Those seats are the constituency of Cochrane and the constituency of Kenora-Rainy River. With such a vast area to be covered, there really ought to have been a third seat encompassing a substantial rural area.

At present, the two members concerned face an almost impossible task travelling around and trying to provide adequate representation for electors who live in all of northeastern and northwestern Ontario covered by those two seats. The latest proposals of the commission will mean a substantial dilution of the representation the electors affected had come to expect as a result of the decision of the previous commission to go from 11 seats to 12 seats.

Again I want to emphasise the desire on the part of all the members from northern Ontario, as well as those people who appeared at the commission's hearings, to accept the distortions which must occur if there are to be twelve seats in northern Ontario. We acknowledge the problem facing the commission. We understand the difficulty they face in carving out twelve seats when the population figure is barely above the number required to make 12 seats according to the act. Nevertheless, we urge the commission to take into account the arguments which have been put forward by the hon. member for Thunder Bay and the arguments I have put forward on this occasion.

● (1740)

I want also to touch on another aspect that was raised by the hon. members for Thunder Bay and Ontario. I refer to the question of giving reasons for the decisions arrived at. I think it is clear that nobody expected there to be detailed reasons for the drawing of every line in every constituency. What we did expect and what was anticipated was that where a major change was taking place, where there was significant alteration in the previous pattern of representation, the commission would have recognized what was being done and provided the rationale that would permit adequate debate to take place among those of the population who chose to appear before the commission at the public hearings. It was that intention that led the hon. member for Edmonton West (Mr. Lambert) to present his motion, and I think it was that intention that led the House of Commons to accept it and pass it into law.

In the case of northern Ontario, where a substantial alteration is taking place in the representation available to those who live in that region, no reasons at all were given. It seems to me that the intent of the amendment passed by the House was violated because the commission did not choose to take it into account in giving reasons why it found it necessary to make the change. Who knows, perhaps had the commission put down its reasons and outlined the thoughts and desires they had in reducing the number of seats in northern Ontario from 12 to 11, it would not have been possible for us to argue against its reasons and excuses. As it turns out, because no reason was given, when we made our presentation to the commission in Thunder Bay and Sudbury we did not know what kind of case we had to make. It was for that reason that the House provided the legislation to ensure that there be proper debate. As I said before, Mr. Speaker, it may be that the

reasons were so compelling and the commission's conclusions were so logical that we would have had no arguments to present against them in any case. In point of fact, since we had no reasons we have had great difficulty in formulating arguments to influence the commission in the way we wish.

In closing my brief remarks, Mr. Speaker, I want to make the argument that the pattern in previous commissions has been to provide us with the extra seat. This commission has reversed that decision and not given us reasons. Those of us who represent northwestern and northeastern Ontario, and those among the population who appeared before the commissions in Sudbury and Thunder Bay, all expressed a willingness to accept the inevitable distortions that must take place to keep the 12 seats. We respectfully appeal to the commission to re-examine the situation, to reverse the decision they made and to provide 12 seats in northwestern Ontario.

**Mr. J.-J. Blais (Parliamentary Secretary to President of the Privy Council):** Mr. Speaker, it is with a great deal of trepidation that I join in this particular debate, in view of the fact that I have my neighbour to the south chastising me for coming into this debate late. I will await with anticipation his golden remarks when he speaks in this debate, though how anyone with such a charming riding is interested in placing objections, I cannot imagine.

With reference to the riding of Nipissing, very early on I showed interest in the question of redistribution. Your Honour may recall that in January, 1973, which was my first session, we had been dealing with redistribution and I spoke in the debate at that time, primarily because, as has been pointed out by the hon. member for Thunder Bay (Mr. Penner) and the hon. member for Kenora-Rainy River (Mr. Reid), there was an attempt to reduce the number of seats in northern Ontario from 12 to 10.

At that time I felt the commissioners were being as fair as they could, being stuck with instruments that were not adequate to do the job. I had hoped that having redistribution frozen, as it was, a new redistribution could be brought in that would do justice to northern Ontario. I felt that northern Ontario, more than any other part of Canada, exemplified the problem posed by redistribution, namely, that as a rural area it suffered from a reduction in its representative efficiency as a result of redistribution.

At a later time I proposed a private member's bill whereby commissioners would be permitted to deviate downward from the provincial norm of 25 per cent to 35 per cent. It was my hope that with that amendment to the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act there would be the possibility that the commissioners would provide 12 seats in northern Ontario, notwithstanding the lesser proportionate increase in population in the area south of Lake Nipissing and the French River.

If I recall correctly, I was discouraged from proceeding with that bill by the hon. member for Kenora-Rainy River, because it was believed that if there were a general increase in the total number of seats in the House of Commons, we in northern Ontario would be in the position where there would be no reduction in seats. So, effectively, the aberration that took place as a result of the first report,