

Electoral Boundaries Commission

will determine the boundaries of the constituencies, and would be in a good position to assist them in making a determination, and thereby avoid mistakes.

Above all, what we want to do in this matter is avoid as many mistakes as possible. It is sometimes said that we progress by mistakes, but I am sure the Minister of Transport is not one of those who wishes to advance by mistakes; at least I hope he is not. However, it could be that unless this matter is handled properly many, many mistakes will be made, and once a determination has been made this machinery the act proposes to set up is not sufficiently flexible in order to bring about changes.

There are a couple of other points I should like to mention. For example, rural constituencies because of their very nature and their problems are, in a sense, quite different from urban constituencies, and in so far as possible they should be kept as rural constituencies. Many of the rural constituencies cover large areas. For instance, my riding is about 140 or 150 miles north and south, and 150 miles east and west. In such a tremendous area population is very scattered, and some parts are very thinly populated. But that area requires attention and has its problems just the same as other places. It requires the servicing of industry and it takes a lot of travelling to cover it thoroughly.

It would be to the advantage of its residents to have the riding left as a rural constituency so that the thought and attention of its member of parliament can be devoted primarily to rural problems. If that is true, and without going into further detail on the nature of these various problems, I think there must be a 33½ per cent tolerance to overcome the factor of the tremendous areas which rural constituencies cover, as compared with urban constituencies. With the advent of the motor car and the concentration of population in cities, in contrast to the rural areas, it is only fair that at least a 33½ per cent tolerance be given with respect to the number of people in a rural constituency as compared with the number in an urban riding. With these few remarks, Mr. Chairman, I turn the floor back to you.

Mr. Bigg: I just wish to add a few words to what has already been said on this question of redistribution. I should like to begin by mentioning just one constituency where the application of any rule of thumb would not work out at all, and I refer to the Northwest Territories. I think the total population of the territories is in the neighbourhood of 20,000, and as hon. members probably know

it is by far the largest. I am certainly surprised that we should be thinking of including an even greater area as part of this already immense riding.

My own constituency has a total area of some 65,000 square miles and at least half of it is without roads. In fact, I believe some 40,000 square miles are without roads. Large regions are not even served by airports. It is really a part of the north country and should be included among the areas to which special consideration should be given if they are to be covered adequately. I should like to see a clause in this measure—call it an emergency clause—to deal with circumstances of this kind. I think the government should give quite special consideration to these areas—areas whose coverage presents peculiar and singular problems. It is obvious that there are vast stretches of this northern country where an hon. member cannot get around his constituency in a normal way and I think a clause should be written into the elections act to take into account the special difficulties caused by the nature of the territory, the scarcity of communications and the unusual expense which anyone representing these areas has to bear. I cannot understand how a member representing the Northwest Territories can possibly get along, bearing in mind the expenses they must bear.

As the commissions begin their work, I think they should certainly consult the local members, not necessarily to take their recommendations—I realize there may be political recommendations made—but in order to take advantage of realistic and practical suggestions which might well save the government and the people of Canada both time and money. After all, our only reason for being here is to represent our ridings, and if it is physically impossible for a member to move around the constituency he represents, something should be done to help him do so. This is why I maintain every effort should be made to set up the boundaries in a realistic fashion. Let me give the committee one or two illustrations of what I mean. The hon. member for Jasper-Edson has to travel a hundred miles through my district of Athabasca to get to the town of Smith in his own constituency. There is no other way of getting there. It seems to me it would be logical to alter the boundaries between these two districts, because I can certainly get to that particular locality to handle the complaints or to attend to the wishes of the people there much easier than can the hon. member from next door.

The use of arbitrary lines to mark constituency boundaries often leads to trouble. We have used meridians, and when this is done, except perhaps where an interprovincial