

Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act

Mr. D. Gordon Blair (Grenville-Carleton): Mr. Speaker, the most interesting discussion initiated in connection with the bill in the name of the hon. member for Edmonton West (Mr. Lambert) is one which engages the concern of all of us. The hon. member for Algoma East (Mr. Foster) has referred to the major reform which took place in 1964 when the procedure for defining the boundaries of constituencies in Canada was taken out of politics. This reform had been long advocated by public-spirited and responsible citizens.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): And long opposed in Parliament.

Mr. Blair: Yes. The hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) should know. It was long opposed in Parliament. I was about to say it was for a long time a principle to which political parties and politicians paid much lip service but it was always observable that they were much more concerned about the principle of the non-political definition of political boundaries when their parties were out of office than when they were in office.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): We were consistent.

Mr. Blair: The hon. member's party is always out of office and, therefore, always consistent. In any event, this was a major change and I believe it was a change which none of us would wish to disturb. However, like all changes, it produces disturbance. I conclude from what the hon. member for Edmonton West has said, and perhaps from what others have said, that virtue does not always bring its own reward: it sometimes leads to pain and tribulation.

However, I am sure that in the country in general there will be disagreement with the proposition which was advanced by the hon. member for Edmonton West and supported at least in part by my hon. friend from Algoma, that is, that we in this Parliament, as Members of Parliament, are the best judges of the type of constituencies we should represent and the boundaries of those constituencies. I think we should adopt a much more modest posture and recognize that the people of this country in every way possible have made it clear that they do not think we are the best judges at all. Our judgments on these matters in the past have always been partisan, they have been coloured by considerations of political advantage and we should do nothing in this chamber to undermine the new system by preparing the way for any type of regression to the old system.

There was a dark undertone in some of the remarks of the hon. member for Edmonton West. He seemed to labour under the suspicion that the redistribution which took place under the new system was not free of political influence.

Mr. Lambert (Edmonton West): It certainly was not.

Mr. Blair: I do not know whether to be saddened by that charge or whether to be reassured. I might explain that statement by saying that at the time redistribution took place under the new system I was president of the Liberal Party in Ontario. When we first looked at the new electoral map in a serious way, a way which was not uncoloured

[Mr. Foster.]

by consideration of what it did to our party, our first conclusion was that it must have been organized by those awful fellows in other parties.

I think the conclusion of everyone who seriously examined the new electoral map was that the commission had not done a very good job and that politically it would be of advantage to other parties. This is precisely why Parliament in its wisdom and with the support, I am sure, of the majority of the Canadian people decided that the determination of boundary lines should be entrusted to independent commissions. I submit that we in this Parliament, because of our close involvement with the political process, are not able to judge this question equitably and fairly. Because of our intense involvement in the political process we are simply not able to judge these matters objectively and fairly in the interests of all.

• (4:40 p.m.)

I asked a question of my hon. friend from Edmonton West when he was speaking. His proposal is that if the provincial commissioners who determine the boundaries were to give extended reasons for the boundaries that they describe, this would make it easier for Parliament to understand what they had done and also, quite obviously, easier for him to object to what they have done. First of all, I should like to suggest to hon. members that there is nothing in the words of the hon. member for Edmonton West either today or on at least two other occasions in this Parliament to indicate for a minute that he has been inhibited or hampered in any way from objecting to what happened to his seat because reasons were not given for the boundaries that were set. He has been eloquent in his complaints against what the commission in Alberta did. But he needs, of course, bigger porters to carry the message.

The hon. member has had his opportunity in this Parliament to object to the procedure, but what he is really objecting to is the result. I am sure that he is in the position of all of us who have argued cases in the courts. When we lose the battle it is sometimes hard to accept the decision, but it must be accepted. As my hon. friend from Algoma (Mr. Foster) pointed out, when these kinds of decisions are made, the proper course is to draw back and perhaps accept the fact that the tribunal which makes the decisions is better informed and instructed than those of us who have particular points of view to argue.

I have not been unduly harsh with my hon. friend from Edmonton West because I know he is not using this bill in any sense as a vehicle to accommodate some difficulties he has had in his constituency. He has used his constituency, and others in the province of Alberta that he knows well, as examples of the difficulties that have occurred under this new method of redistribution.

Mr. Lambert (Edmonton West): I want to eliminate incompetence and ignorance in these matters.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): People who live in glass houses should be careful.

Mr. Blair: The difficulties that are bound to occur are obvious to all of us. There are certain practical factors that nobody can get around. The first is that there has to be a basic numerical unit of representation, because no