

*Electoral Boundaries*

When talking about redistribution, people talk about the interest of Canada. They talk about objectivity and fair play. It usually does not take too long to get down the power block plays and individual self-interest. It seems we did not even get started to discuss the philosophy, and matters of high intent. Instead, a bill was presented on the basis of pragmatic parochialism and self-interest. Speaking on the bill in the current Canadian parliament is, indeed, frustrating, knowing that as I stand to speak on the things that are wrong with this bill, these same factors, assure the passage of the measure and continued disproportionate representation to Western Canada, and in particular to British Columbia.

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As the member for Fraser Valley West, I can stand in my place in the House of Commons and speak about inequitable freight rates, the flooding of the Fraser River, or the attack by the federal government on provincial resource rights. But once again, of what significance will it be when you are speaking about these critical problems to a government that recognizes that it can get elected—and the last election validates this—without the western vote? We bemoan the fact that a government can be produced almost solely from central Canada. We are concerned that this is a serious blow to national unity, and yet by simply recognizing this fact we are, in effect recognizing the regional character of Canada, and, more important we are making an indirect argument for equitable regional representation.

Western Canadians would accept economic equalization much more readily if Eastern Canadians would accept equalization of representation for Western Canadians. Most of those who have spoken in the debate to this point have recognized that the West has not had its fair share of representation of terms of numbers in the House of Commons, both now and under the current proposals. One simply has to take note that it takes 3.7 B.C. votes to equal one Prince Edward Island vote in terms of straight proportional representation. But this is only one side of the question. Certainly nobody wants to deny Prince Edward Island or any other small province their share of representation simply because they are not growing. The idea of redistribution is not to reward growth but to do all we can to ensure equitable treatment for the various parts of this vast and diversified country.

**Some hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Wenman:** In other words, what we want to do is to consider the overall good of the country, rather than solely preoccupying ourselves with mathematical equality. Equalization of representation relative to regionalization is as valid a concept as representation by population. If we were to divide Canada into its natural five or six regions this would provide each region of Canada with between 46 and 53 members per region. While I realize the pragmatic improbability of British Columbia and the Yukon region receiving approximately 46 to 53 seats, and a need to compromise representation by population, the compromise between regional representation and representation by population, as it appears in this bill, is totally against the interest of British Columbia.

[Mr. Wenman.]

Western Canada has quietly accepted economic equalization, Well, perhaps not so quietly of late.

**Mr. Benjamin:** What do you mean by economic equalization?

**Mr. Wenman:** I mean the situation whereby Western Canada supports the confederation of Canada economically, particularly British Columbia and Alberta, as "have" provinces. We do not object to this too strongly. However, in the light of legislation before the House, as well as historic Western discrimination and over-compromise on the part of Western Canada, it is time for Eastern Canada to recognize Western Canadian and, particularly, British Columbia demands for equalization of representation as well as economic equalization.

From my point of view, a similar sized, or even smaller sized, House of Commons with more effective individual M.P.'s would be the best concept to ensure efficient and effective democratic processes. Before we start legislating grand schemes to increase the size of the House—and is there really a limit once that starts—perhaps we should concentrate on making what we have here, and what we do here, more effective.

It is typical Liberal aphorism that quality comes with quantity; that to deal with a problem you first think in terms of quantity. Do we really want or need more representation? Does more representation mean better representation? Personally, I doubt it. The opportunities to speak and participate as an M.P. are already considerably limited through the appropriation of the limited time available for the day.

We often lament the fact the legislature is on the decline in the twentieth century while the executive is becoming increasingly more dominant. We see this most clearly in terms of power and responsibility when comparing political executives and senior civil servants with M.P.'s who are not in the cabinet.

But this disparity is manifested in another way also, perhaps an even more important way, since it penetrates to the very root of what democratic government is all about. This is the area of information and expertise. An unfortunate development in the legislature's decline has been the increasing disparity in expertise and knowledge between those who are part of the executive and those who are not. This is critically important because it tends to undermine the day to day accountability of ministers to the members of parliament, a development that threatens to render ineffective not only the opposition but parliament as well. Such steady attenuation of accountability cannot be tolerated in a democracy, and the bill before us continues to atone the consolidated power of the executive to grow.

As any non-executive member of the Canadian parliament knows, information and expertise is the single most important thing a member needs to be effective. Accountability in government is all but impossible without it. But, at the same time, as most members are only too aware, the technical facilities and resources available to the ordinary M.P. are dismally inadequate. They are so inadequate that one sometimes wonders how a member is able to deal with a question or policy in any but the most superficial way.