

Electoral Boundaries Commission

House of Commons and to provide for the readjustment of such representation in accordance therewith.

Hon. Gordon Churchill (Winnipeg South Centre): This is the next item of business to come before us, and it is of considerable importance. We spent two or three days on it earlier in the session, and I presume the house is of a mood to proceed with it fairly rapidly. I believe it will be called as the matter of business for tomorrow, in addition to the time we may spend on it tonight. I am quite prepared to make some contribution to this debate now, and I will complete my remarks when we reach the committee stage.

Twelve years ago the subject of redistribution was in front of this house. I made an intensive study of the problem and prepared a major speech on the subject. However, I was seated in the back row against the curtains, and everybody who occupies that position today will understand why I did not get an opportunity of contributing to that debate. I find now that I have a chance to put some thoughts on the record with regard to this very important subject. I am in agreement with the mover of the motion, the Minister of Transport (Mr. Pickersgill) and others who have spoken in this debate, that we have now reached a landmark in Canadian history and we are going to deal with the problem of redistribution in perhaps a more sensible manner than has been the case in other years.

What I have to say is in the same mood and temper of the remarks made by others who have spoken in the debate. It is a serious consideration of this problem and I have no intention of referring to incidents in the past illustrating how redistribution was dealt with at that time. We are coming of age in Canada with regard to this problem and are simply attempting to do now what perhaps we should have done many years ago. We are following the example set by other countries.

One thing which concerns me, and I am going to limit my remarks to this subject, is the attitude that will be taken by the commissioners when they approach this problem. I am not going to enter into discussion as to whether there should be one commission or ten, although I prefer only one. But no matter how many commissions there are, when the commissioners finally get down to work I am concerned about how they will approach the problem, because we have had a variety of opinion expressed in the house with regard to the tolerance factor which has been written into the bill.

It may be that the commissioners will have uppermost in their minds—unless they have

seriously considered this problem—strict representation by population. It may be that they will have other views with regard to how they conduct their operation, and I do not know how parliament can be assured that they will interpret the will of parliament when they undertake their task. They may lean more to strict representation by population than perhaps would meet with the opinion of those hon. members who have already addressed the house.

Two or three hon. members who have spoken have gone very far towards the strict representation by population idea. Others have expressed the idea that the tolerance should be anywhere from 20 per cent to 33½ per cent. We are not setting out in the bill, although this will be discussed when we reach the particular clause, a very strict set of guidance rules for the commissioners, except for the tolerance figure which is to be written into the bill.

Reference has been made to the experience in some countries. New Zealand and Australia have been mentioned, but I think the commissioners' attention should be drawn to the experience in the British Isles where, in 1944, when they started on this problem of taking care of redistribution by a commission, they introduced a tolerance figure of 25 per cent into their act. With their experience based on that, the commissioners then discovered it limited them in making divisions of the constituencies, recognizing the county and borough divisions in the country, and the special features of certain areas in the United Kingdom.

Therefore, in 1947 the British parliament passed an act to modify the 1944 act, and the 1947 act had a very interesting phrase introducing it. It is called an act to relax the rules as they were set out in the third schedule of the 1944 act, and in the 1947 act they rescinded the rule which set the tolerance figure at 25 per cent and left it open, without restricting in any way the activities of the commissioners.

If you read the reports of the commissioners for England proper, for Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland—because they have the four commissions—you find reference by the commissioners to the advantage they found in the removal of that restriction. Consequently we should consider very seriously whether or not the experience in England should be given weight. Rather than tie the hands of the commissioners can we not leave them the freedom that perhaps they will require in dealing with certain areas?

The second thing I would like to spend some time on, but I have only three minutes left tonight, is to say that no matter how much we like to talk about representation by