

Electoral Boundaries Commissions

of seats among the provinces were made, that it was done precisely because the old rule, where Quebec had a fixed number of seats, 65, was very unfair to certain of the provinces, and particularly to the province of Quebec. That had the effect of maintaining the representation of the province of Ontario, which was the most populous province, above its just deserts according to the strict rules of representation by population.

When the amendment was made to the British North America Act which established the present rule—with the exception that was made, I believe in 1951, to meet a special situation that then existed in Saskatchewan—when the final rule was made after the war, I think it was in 1947, and I am speaking from memory—that amendment was proposed by my right hon. friend Mr. St. Laurent, who, I do not think, would ever be accused of wanting to be unfair to any part of the country. It was proposed so that we would have a closer approach to equality among the provinces and so that this disparity that existed for many years between Ontario and Quebec would be removed.

There is no doubt that, apart from the special provisions that are in the constitution with respect to the least populous provinces, and which at the present time operate only in the case of Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick, it is fair to say that the operation of section 51 of the British North America Act in so far as all the other provinces are concerned, except Saskatchewan, is precisely to reflect the actual population of those provinces.

I do not think that to go back to the system of giving a fixed representation to, say, the province of Quebec, or to any other province, would alter that at all. It might alter the total number of members that would be in the house, and probably would alter it very slightly at present time, but it would not really affect the relative position. However this is a big question and I do not think the Chair would permit anyone to offer an amendment on it to this bill.

If we wished to do that, I think we have to go beyond the scope of this bill and deal with the British North America Act itself, and that is a matter for which I could not possibly take the responsibility alone of making any decision. However I would be very glad to read carefully what the hon. gentleman said and discuss it with my colleagues. But it is something that I think could not be done within the scope of the bill. If in the circumstances the hon. gentleman

would like to have clause 12 stand, and if no one else has any objection, perhaps we might make some progress by letting it stand and going on to other clauses that may not give rise to contention.

Mr. Hamilton: Mr. Chairman, following the position taken by the hon. member for La-pointe and the answer given by the minister, I wonder whether it would not be more than wise to let clause 12 stand, because it occurred to me that when the minister said, rather quickly, that we should let clause 12 stand his mind must have been thinking somewhat along the lines mine was; namely, that if it is the intention of the government to get this bill through, there must be obvious thoughts in the mind of the government as to just what adjustments could be made to the bill that would make it acceptable to all groups in the house.

I think one of the matters that must be going through the mind of the government is the suggestion, for example, of increasing the number of members of the house itself. In this way you get rid of the problem of representation by population with regard to the provinces of Quebec, Nova Scotia and, I think, Manitoba. That is one proposal that must be going through the mind of the government, namely what adjustments can be made to their bill to get it through the house.

Another suggestion arises from the minister's remarks about Saskatchewan. The situation in 1954 must surely have been identical in every detail with the situation that existed in 1952. At that time we had 21 members from Saskatchewan and the representation by population principle as provided by section 12 meant we would have to lose five seats, if I remember correctly. The government of that day, in common justice to the province of Saskatchewan, could not envisage such a radical jump in one redistribution bill and brought in an amendment under the Right Hon. Louis St. Laurent along that line, and applied this 15 per cent rule, so that we only lost four seats at that time.

At the present time, under the representation by population rule we stand to lose four seats. Surely if five seats was too much to lose out of 21, it is an even greater slump in our representation to lose four seats out of 17. Surely the minister, who is very conscious of the necessity of making some adjustments in this bill to get it through, would reconsider with his colleagues the question of doing something about this 15 per cent rule that we have at the present time in relation to Saskatchewan.