

*Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Suspension*

relative growth of the population of various regions in the province, the accessibility of such regions, and the size or shape thereof when they appear to the commission to render such a departure necessary or desirable, or any special community or diversity of interests of the inhabitants of various regions of the province which appear to the commission to render such a departure necessary or desirable. I think those are good criteria when applied properly.

● (1750)

As to what was done in the last redistribution by the present commissioners and the sort of performance we witnessed in the various provinces, I have not had the benefit of viewing province by province an analysis of the performance but I am somewhat familiar with what has gone on in the largest province, namely, Ontario.

First, there was the publicity. The commissioners were very responsible in outlining the nature of the process in which they were engaged and in giving members of parliament and members of the public full knowledge and advance warning of the nature of the process and what rights were open to them. All of us will remember the initial call for submissions, and the maps that were published, at great public expense I might add, in the newspapers across this land at the time when the various commissioners came in with their reports.

Another feature of the system is that there is full public participation. I was impressed by the manner in which the commissioners conducted their public hearings, the way in which they attempted to go out to members of the public and to say to them that it is their right to come before them to express their views on how the boundaries should be juggled and what would be better for their region. I know that there are many thousands of people in this country who feel that they have participated in the process of redistribution as the result of practices followed by the commissioners in various provinces.

I think that is healthy for democracy. Moreover, I think there is some evidence from some of the second reports of the commissioners that they have listened to members of the public. I am impressed by the number of occasions on which the commissioners have accepted recommendations in a non-partisan way and have attempted to accommodate the needs, not only of the sitting members of the House, but of defected members, of new candidates, or of ordinary members of the public. I think that too is healthy.

Finally, I would suggest that there is a reasonable timetable for the implementation of the process. While we cannot pin it down to a specific week or month, with a reasonable degree of anticipation we and the public can learn when the process will be complete, when the new boundaries will take effect, and when Canadians will participate in an election according to the new boundaries with some degree of certainty, far greater certainty, I believe, than if the whole system had been left to the political process or to some new process that may be devised by the government and presented to the House next fall.

I am concerned that this move to delay is because there are some members of the House who are not happy with

[Mr. Atkey.]

some of the basic premises of the present legislation. I suggest—and I will say it boldly—that there are members of the House who, even admitting the variance of 25 per cent, will deny that representation by population has any place in the law of Canada. I think that is wrong and I feel compelled to stand up in the House and say so.

One of the fundamental rights of the individual in a free society is to be able to participate with others in the political process on an equal basis. Whether that individual is located in a rural or in an urban setting, whether he lives on a farm or in a high rise apartment, whether he lives in a fishing village or in a three storey mansion in the middle of Toronto, he is a Canadian and has an interest in the decisions that are taken in Ottawa. His interest as an individual is important. The extent to which the House perpetuates the system which lessens the weight of his vote to any greater degree than the 25 per cent that is now permitted either way is, in my view, unhealthy for democracy and unhealthy for Canada.

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

**Mr. Atkey:** Let me speak as an urban member. I will be very honest. My riding in the middle of Toronto, one of the largest cities in the country, is one of the smallest ridings in the city, both geographically and in terms of numbers of people. To be quite candid, I do not have the individual problems of the hon. member for Peel South (Mr. Blenkarn), the hon. member for York Scarborough (Mr. Stanbury), or the hon. member for York North (Mr. Danson). They have serious problems of an individual nature in their ridings.

What I am concerned about is the people living in cities generally, about urban politics, and the fact that if we were to derogate from the principle of representation by population, the political process here in Ottawa would become increasingly irrelevant to those people in the cities. I think that is unhealthy. I think that this House is becoming more and more irrelevant to the real power processes in the cities. We see the advent of municipal government, and that the quality of municipal politicians is improving.

I think provincial governments have far more relevance to the problems of the city than does the central government in Ottawa. To the extent that this government and this political process become increasingly irrelevant to the people in the cities, we take one step farther toward the disintegration and fragmentation of this country. Again I say that is unhealthy.

The problems to which I have referred—and there are problems with the redistribution under the present law—were outlined very well by some hon. members in relation to the provinces of Alberta, New Brunswick and Manitoba. There may be some problem in terms of provinces which are losing seats, and there may be some accommodation that can be arrived at to achieve some sort of justice in the minds of the people in those provinces, but I will not let those types of problems be used as an excuse to change the fundamental premise of the 1964 act, which in my view is still one of the most significant political achievements of the Parliament of that time and should be given a chance to operate. It operated in a non-partisan way, generally speaking, and I think all of us in the House should have