

Electoral Boundaries Commission

wily, very clever and attractive personality, Sir John A. Macdonald. Certainly the 1882 gerrymander becomes the classic case in Canada and one that presents a great deal of amusement and interest to people who can now look back at history and perhaps not be as concerned about its evil consequences.

This bill poses a real problem. It is a matter which calls for earnest consideration with respect to principle. Now it would seem to have no chance of adequate consideration and debate. We do not want to be in the position, at this stage of the session, of impeding the government in any of their proper undertakings.

I have read with some care the Diefenbaker promises of 1957 and on this matter of redistribution it would seem that as early as the fall of 1956, the man who now presides over the government of Canada had very clear ideas about redistribution; at least, one would have thought he had.

In the addresses given yesterday one can find words and a good deal of talk on generalities almost as vague as some of the other recommendations which have been brought to this house. We have heard two addresses, one from the hon. member for Bonavista-Twillingate and one from the hon. member for Port Arthur which will indicate to the people of Canada something of the complexity of this problem.

I represent a riding which in population, I have no doubt, is below national average. When there was discussion of redistribution in recent months there was immediate consideration of what this would do to certain seats. The effects will be felt by a number of Liberals in this house. We should like to know what the governing principle here shall be.

It was my pleasure in recent days to spend some time in the Cariboo and to see something of the complications of this vast riding, and of the adjacent Skeena riding which has been referred to by the hon. member for Port Arthur. Does it make sense that we should depart from the area concept? I cannot find myself subscribing to the principle which I think is inherent in the speech of the hon. member for Port Arthur with respect to the special sovereign interests of provinces. I doubt whether it represents a true interpretation of the constitutional situation but it is certainly one which has been advanced by some able constitutional lawyers and particularly by some scholars in the province of Quebec. All this illustrates how unwise would be too speedy a disposition of a matter so fundamental to democratic rights.

I subscribe to the idea of an independent council and we know of the high qualifications and character of the chief electoral officer. Here is a person something like the chairman of the Bank of Canada whose office renders him somewhat independent of the government; a person who has a high judicial function, and we are fortunate at this time that we have this kind of person to preside when this matter is to be raised.

I read some days ago a number of clippings with respect to the suggestion of reform. When we read those clippings we realize how very complex this matter is, almost too complex to involve us at this stage when we shall not have time to debate the basic considerations. We have been waiting week after week to go into specific matters such as the exchange fund which we thought would have been discussed three or four weeks ago.

Mr. Grafftey: Whose fault is that?

Mr. Matheson: The hon. member for Brome-Missisquoi is again intervening. I may tell him that some of us have gone away from this place in order to meet people who are qualified to give helpful advice on this subject which we thought was of urgent importance. We thought this exchange legislation was the kind of thing which could not be left over. We did not think it was possible for this mint and exchange bill proposed by the Minister of Finance to be delayed. We thought this was something to which we would have to address ourselves. I remember flying here so as to be able to make some modest contribution to a subject which was highly complex and upon which we had to seek the best possible advice in a hurry. Over a week ago I spoke to a person on the west coast who is regarded as one of the highest authorities on this subject. But we did not have time for that legislation.

Now we have before us one of the most complicated and sophisticated problems in the Canadian economy. I would just ask that the committee should consider a statement which appeared in the *London Free Press* of December 5, 1961. The editorial states:

When confederation was established a clause of the British North America Act provided that after every decennial census there should be a redistribution of House of Commons seats. As a protection for Quebec that province was given 65 seats and 65 divided into the Quebec population was the quota for the rest of Canada.

Have we time, now, seriously and earnestly to consider any really meritorious contribution to redistribution? I submit that at this stage that is asking this committee to do the impossible.

The Chairman: Is the committee ready for the question?