

Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Suspension

karn) referred to the amendment in the British North America Act which established senatorial floors for certain provinces. I remind him that that provision was not in the British North America Act in 1867; it was brought in in 1915 when the problem of representation from the maritime provinces came to the fore.

At this juncture in history that problem has arisen in respect of provinces like Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Nova Scotia to an extent, and certainly Newfoundland. I submit that even those of us who favour representation by population have a right to say that, if there are floors that protect certain small provinces, consideration should be given to floors to protect other provinces. This is what we are asking.

I submit that the hon. member for Peel South is not really facing up to the situation when he says it is so simple a matter that it can be decided in a few months' time. If we are to amend the constitution, if we are to try to solve this problem of fairness among the provinces, I think we will have to give whatever committee or body does that a reasonable amount of time. I would hope it could be solved in a very few months. Indeed, I could suggest a solution this afternoon in my 20 minute speech which, if the House accepted it, is all the time we need. But when one is speaking of the kind of floor that is necessary and fair for provinces like Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Nova Scotia and Newfoundland, I think in all fairness the matter should be adequately canvassed and that we must take a look at the rights of the larger provinces like British Columbia, Ontario and Quebec. I submit that this sort of an operation could take a bit of time.

I argue, therefore, that to make it a requirement that the matter be disposed of within the next 11 months would jeopardize the whole operation and make the thing quite impracticable. In fact, we could have a situation develop, even if we were to pass a deadline making it July 1, 1974, under which the problem would not then have been solved and therefore we would have to extend the date still further. Although I think the job could be done within six or seven months, and I hope it will be done when the House meets this fall, I believe it is an important enough issue that we are obligated to give the amount of time stipulated in the bill.

The hon. member for Peel South says we should not wait forever. The bill says nothing about waiting forever. The bill says that if Parliament has not reached a decision by January 1, 1975, the process which at the moment is being interrupted would be reinstated. I suggest the bill not only is one which gives an opportunity to cope with the problem, but that the bill stipulates that the delay cannot go on forever and that by January 1, 1975, unless Parliament has acted, the process which now obtains in the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act would be revived.

I regard the issue that leads me to support Bill C-208 as a serious one, namely the matter of a formula as among the provinces that is fair. So far as I am concerned, that is what is at issue, not the issue of independent commissions. That principle must be maintained. Neither do I like criticizing the work the commissions have done. But I believe it is unfair that Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick with their small populations are protected by

[Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre).]

floors without any consideration having been given to such a floor for the protection of Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, Manitoba and Saskatchewan. Because that issue is important, and because I would not expect the House to accept my solution without adequate study of it, I believe we should give Parliament a reasonable length of time to deal with it.

I say again that I hope it will be dealt with this fall and that new legislation can be passed and machinery put in operation so that the new boundaries may be in effect sooner than anticipated. However, let us not jeopardize the operation and make this impossible by expecting it to be done in the next 11 months. Therefore, it is my intention to vote against the amendment of the hon. member for Peel South, and I express the hope that Bill C-208 in the form in which it came back from the committee will be passed on third reading.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Roch La Salle (Joliette): Mr. Speaker, I would like to make a few comments on the amendment before us.

Like the previous speaker, the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles), I admit that it is important that the commission responsible for the project we are considering, namely electoral boundaries readjustment, be independent. I suggest that the idea of proposing an 18 month deadline is not overrated in view of such important factors and so many problems. While I fully support the bill before us, it seems impossible to me to pass the amendment if we really are to make a serious examination of all the problems involved as regards the readjustment of electoral boundaries.

We will have to re-assess population factors, which have already been assessed by the commission. In my opinion, all hon. members seem to reproach the commission with taking into account only this factor, that is the number of constituents in each riding.

We hope that during this six-month period, the commission will make an in-depth analysis of economic and social factors. I suggest that the commission has a lot to do and that it will require as much time as possible. If we really want to readjust electoral boundaries in a fairer way than was proposed, to have a much more equitable representation, I suggest that it is important that we take all necessary time and, in my opinion, 18 months will certainly not be too much.

I hope, Mr. Speaker, that when during this 18 month period, the Commission studies the importance of maintaining the present number of members, in each province, it will also consider the increased numbers needed in some provinces. I am thinking in particular of Quebec where, taking into consideration the special situation that exists there, we would not lose two members, as the commission had foreseen.

In order to make this assessment, which is based on a number of very important criteria and factors—and I stress this point—we must not limit ourselves to the time factor, but rather we must take all the time needed to redefine the number of constituencies and the number of members so that each region can be as fairly represented as possible. I hope that this will fill some of the gaps which were restricted to the number of voters.