

Electoral Boundaries Commission

hope the commissioners will look into their experience. In fact, I hope the committee will examine this British practice because it is a country which has had the experience of doing this for some 20 years.

As I understand it, although they do not want their boundary commissions to be changing the constituency boundaries every year, nevertheless they are in a position to make changes if the population increases at a rather great rate in certain areas, and we should be prepared to do something like that.

They also have some leeway, so far as England is concerned, with regard to the membership of the House of Commons. It is a loosely worded phrase, but it does permit them to alter the membership a little bit. This might be necessary in some instances where you require an extra seat by splitting a very large constituency. I do not see why we should not have a look at that, especially when we are putting on the statute books something that is to apply for a considerable length of time.

I would like the commissioners to look at the British practice. I would like this committee to examine the situation in Great Britain where they have their four area divisions of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland; and for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland a fixed number of seats has been written into the act. This has been done in order to provide for representation to less populated regions, so that they can maintain their position of representation within the House of Commons and not gradually be cut down—they will not pass out of existence—to the point where their representation would be very low.

I think a relationship can be shown between the situation in Canada and the situation in Great Britain. Here in Canada we have a situation, by the process that has been going on under the senatorial floor, which is written into the act, where the Atlantic provinces correspond to, say, Wales or Scotland, because under the floor for the Atlantic provinces the number of seats in the maritimes will not drop below 31. They will drop to 32 in this redistribution, but they will not go below 31, and even if the populations of Quebec and Ontario were to increase at the same rapid rate they have shown in the last ten years—which is about 3 per cent—the representation from the Atlantic provinces will be maintained in the house. I favour this. I think it is proper and I would not like to see that representation reduced.

Why should we not seriously consider something like that for other parts of Canada? Some hon. members have pointed out the effect the present redistribution will have on Manitoba and Saskatchewan. In 1952, by

quite a bit of skilful footwork, the representation of Saskatchewan was not as seriously reduced as could have been the case. But we are now faced with the situation, pending the interpretation which the hon. member for Bow River has asked for, whereby Saskatchewan will lose four seats and Manitoba will lose one.

Here is a major discrepancy which I think we can avoid if we give serious attention to the bill before us and make a proper amendment. Under the census of 1961 the combined population of the four Atlantic provinces was given as 1,897,425. Now under the distribution of seats to which they are entitled at the present moment they will have a combined total of 32 which gives them a quotient of 59,294. Set that against Manitoba and Saskatchewan. The combined population of those two prairie provinces is 1,846,867 according to the 1961 census—only 30,000 fewer than the population of the four Atlantic provinces. The seats to which they will be entitled under the redistribution now contemplated will be 26 and the quotient per constituency will be 71,033 which is, incidentally, higher than the quotient which has already been estimated for Canada as a whole. Here, with our eyes open, we are establishing a discrepancy between two very important areas of this country. I suggest we should guard against doing so, because why should the Atlantic provinces have 32 seats in this house while the prairies provinces of Manitoba and Saskatchewan with a population almost the same, have only 26? Immediately one finds a variation of six seats as between two of the great areas of Canada. This situation is one which I think should be examined.

Then, as has been pointed out, we have a somewhat nebulous protection, which I think has been mentioned, for the provinces out there in the absence of a senatorial floor. So by 1971 it is conceivable that Manitoba and Saskatchewan representation could drop from 26 seats to 20 and that the Atlantic provinces would then have 31.

Mr. Pickersgill: I think the hon. gentleman has forgotten the 15 per cent rule. I do not think it would be possible to fall from 15 to ten in one single drop.

Mr. Churchill: We have to get a legal opinion on that 15 per cent rule, do we not?

Mr. Pickersgill: On the basis which is usually accepted, not on the interesting variant which was offered by the hon. member for Bow River.

Mr. Churchill: Interesting variants are very acceptable in this house sometimes. I am pointing out what might happen unless we