

*Electoral Boundaries*

commissioners, and also the Minister of Manpower and Immigration (Mr. Andras) who expressed his concern about long-term effects of the report of the Ontario commission. I think it is extremely important that before we go any further this matter be clarified—certainly before we go into another election—so that, as the minister suggested, the consequence of an election being for some members declared void because of inadequacy of the report of the commission.

I have considerable sympathy for the commission which had to write this difficult report. It was a difficult job. In this regard, Ontario is a very difficult province and very different from many others. The limits within which the commissioners had to work were such that their job was extremely trying.

● (1700)

However, the report of the commission has not been taken well in northern Ontario. As a matter of fact, since I was elected to this House in 1972 I do not think there has been an issue in northern Ontario which has bothered people as much as the loss of a seat through redistribution. People in northern Ontario, particularly in northwestern Ontario, see this as a basic reduction in their political power. This is an area of the country with many problems. There are problems of slow growth, economic problems, a series of communications and transportation problems. All these things need much attention, and the feeling is that there has been a noticeable reduction in power and that northwestern and northern Ontario do not count as much as they did before redistribution.

In many parts of the area government services are few and far between. We do not have the kind of services which are available in larger cities like Toronto or available to people 50 or 100 miles away from Toronto. The distances are great and the services are few; therefore, the role of the member of parliament becomes much more difficult and at the same time more vital.

The hon. member for York-Simcoe (Mr. Stevens) was talking about having one of the new ridings in his area and that the longest distance in it would be 100 miles. What about ridings where distances are 400, 500, 600, 700 and 800 miles, where communities are 100 and 200 miles apart and where constituencies run from Lake Superior to Hudson Bay and James Bay? These are the kinds of problems we face in northern Ontario.

I should like to deal briefly with one of my concerns. At the beginning I mentioned the legality of the report of the commission and the question of whether the report could stand up in court because no reasons are given. This point was made by the hon. member for Thunder Bay, but I should like to deal with another aspect of the report of the commission, and to give my opinion as to how the commission should view the meaning of the deliberations over the last three years in this House.

Most hon. members who were here in the twenty-ninth parliament will recall the long debate over redistribution as it was brought out in early 1973, and the fact that there was a change in the British North America Act to allow for more seats in the country so that no province would have fewer seats than they had at that time. If the commissioners would reread that debate—and I am sure they already

[Mr. McRae.]

have—I think they will find a strong feeling expressed that even though areas like northwestern Ontario are not provinces, they should maintain their political power.

Hon. members from northwestern Ontario and northern Ontario worked very hard and were instrumental in having the BNA Act changed. I think the meaning of the vote in this House was that northern Ontario, even though part of a province, should be treated as provinces like Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Saskatchewan and would not lose a seat in this redistribution. Northern Ontario comprises a unique area. It is quite different from the northern parts of any of the other provinces. It tends to be cut off geographically and culturally. It spreads over perhaps 1,000 miles. It is very large. It tends to have quite a separate existence. In the field of curling, for instance, Northern Ontario is treated as a separate province. It was not possible under the amendment to the BNA Act—unless, of course, we want to set up an extra province—to allow for the maintenance of these seats in northern Ontario. However, I think most hon. members will agree—certainly those who took part in the debates in 1973 and 1974—that the meaning was there. The spirit of the change in the law was that northern Ontario would not lose a seat in this redistribution.

I hope that when the commission reviews the debate of yesterday and today and before coming up with their final report, it will take another look at the earlier debates to try to garner from them the intentions of this House when it voted to change the BNA Act to ensure that no province would lose a seat in the course of redistribution. I submit that northwestern Ontario should not lose a seat if the spirit of that debate is to be maintained.

Because of the changes which were made in the BNA Act, four additional seats went to Ontario. As the act stood in the first redistribution report, the minimum number of people in constituencies was to be 63,487. If northern Ontario were divided by 12, the figure would be about 63,500, only about 300 over the minimum allowed under the act as it read in 1973. At that point there was no question that the commission could not just set up a set of 12 constituencies under these conditions with a maximum deviation of only 300 in population.

However, by reason of the amendment to the BNA Act, Ontario received an additional four seats and this gave the commission considerable leeway, about 3,700 people per constituency. It was possible under this latest legislation—and I think we from northern Ontario demonstrated this to the commission—to set up 12 reasonable constituencies, given this deviation of some 3,700 people between one constituency and another.

Between the mid-term census of 1966 and the census of 1971, the population of southern Ontario increased by 11.3 per cent. The population of northern Ontario increased by 5.1 per cent. They both increased, one at roughly twice the rate of the other. However, let us see what happened in terms of redistribution because of these increases. Southern Ontario, with a population increase of 11.3 per cent, had an increase from 75 to 83 seats: that is eight seats. Northern Ontario, with a population increase of 5.1 per cent, went from 12 seats to 11 seats. Southern Ontario had an increase of 10.8 per cent seats, and northern Ontario a decrease of 9.2 per cent. Given the changes over that period