

the increase in the population of the province of Quebec, the prairie provinces will lose seven or eight electoral districts. I understand that if the redistribution was to be done at once, some hon. members, and especially those who sit on the other side of the house, would rise in protest. What happens is solely due to the constitution. The population of Quebec, a province where large families are the rule, which is no commonplace title to fame, has materially increased since the last ten years, and many persons who have left other provinces have found that Quebec was hospitable. Such are the facts. The province of Quebec is justified in demanding that the constitution be upheld, especially since the latter is the very basis of our representative system. Speaking in the Quebec house, whose members were unanimous on that point, Prime Minister Godbout has demanded on behalf and for the protection of the province of Quebec a representation wholly in accordance with the constitution. That desire on the part of the provincial government, and it is also the desire of the whole population of the province, cannot and must not be ignored.

The resolution clearly emphasizes that the readjustment of representation will be proceeded with at the first session held after the cessation of hostilities. The question comes up: What will happen if the war is to last one, two or three years longer, or if there is a general election before the cessation of hostilities? If the resolution is passed and if the government should decide to hold a general election in the coming fall or next winter, it follows that the number of constituencies will still be 245 while it should, in fact, be only 237 or 238.

Do you not believe, Mr. Speaker, that an injustice is being done as regards the rights which the province of Quebec enjoys under the confederation agreement, and that, under the pretext of war, the democratic character of our parliamentary system is being set aside? In my opinion to postpone the redistribution is simply to check the influence which Quebec is entitled to have on the political destinies of this country.

The Prime Minister has referred to an unusual movement of population between the various provinces as a result of the enforcement of the mobilization act and the opening of war plants. The argument is not absolutely convincing, since it is quite possible that the situation may, with the cessation of hostilities, become both normal and permanent.

I am opposed to this resolution for the reasons which I have just stated. I consider that I have no right to take any other stand;

a principle is involved, and it is also a matter of justice for my province. Besides, this resolution interferes with the constitution and my province is especially affected. The government has no justification for overriding the constitution.

Hon. L. S. ST. LAURENT (Minister of Justice): Mr. Speaker, there is very little I think it is necessary for me to say at this time. I wish, however, to deal with one objection that was featured rather prominently in the speeches that have been made.

First of all, it would appear that there are many members of this house who feel it is proper that redistribution should be postponed. They also realize that this cannot be done without some legislation which would be operative notwithstanding the ordinary provisions of the British North America Act. Legislation that would operate notwithstanding the terms of the British North America Act could not be passed in this country and must be obtained from the parliament of the United Kingdom. It has even been suggested that the old traditional form of "a humble address may be presented to His Majesty" indicates a degree of humility that is not compatible with the autonomous state of this country. I do not think that in the courteous forms which have been handed down to us there is anything that need prove a serious danger to our autonomy. But it is a fact that the only way in which legislative provision can be obtained that would operate notwithstanding the provisions of the British North America Act is by an act enacted by the parliament of the United Kingdom. I trust it will not always be so. I trust that there will be a system devised whereby it will be possible for us to deal here in our country with the problems which concern us. But the establishment of that system will require an amendment to be made to the British North America Act, and that amendment will have to be made by the parliament of the United Kingdom. I do not think it would be the temper of this parliament at the present time to undertake to establish any permanent system for amending in a permanent fashion the provisions of our constitution. I hope that day will arrive and that it will arrive soon enough for me to witness a system found and made operative whereby things like this will not require even to be registered, for that is really what it amounts to, as the statute of another parliament.

When it comes to making amendments to our constitution I would like to suggest to hon. members that there appears to be a fundamental distinction to be observed. Confederation was not really a pact between provinces.