

*Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act*

quota for the province, that is to say, the quotient obtained by dividing the population of the province as ascertained by the census by the number of members of the House of Commons to be assigned to the province as calculated by the representation commissioner under section 12—

(c) the commission may depart from the strict application of rules (a) and (b) in any case where

(i) special geographic considerations, including in particular the sparsity, density or relative rate of growth of population of various regions of the province, the accessibility of such regions or the size or shape thereof, appear to the commission to render such a departure necessary or desirable, or

(ii) any special community or diversity of interests of the inhabitants of various regions of the province appears to the commission to render such a departure necessary or desirable,

but in no case, except as may be necessary in order to give effect to rule (b), shall the population of any electoral district in the province as a result thereof depart from the electoral quota for that province to a greater extent than twenty-five per cent more or twenty-five per cent less.

The reasons always fall into the category of the statements set out in section 13, which is the basis for representation. Members certainly have an opportunity to make their voices heard, because under section 17 of the act we have the system of public notice. It sets out that there shall be hearings. As a matter of fact, the commission must advertise in a newspaper in the area a proposed plan of redistribution to show the number of people and the areas they designate. If a member is not happy with the plans of the commission, the battle should be fought at the public hearing; they should make their voices heard in their own back yard, not in Parliament. If this is brought back to Parliament we may as well bring it back the whole way and do away with the independent commission which everyone agrees is a real step forward for democracy.

The hon. member for Edmonton West (Mr. Lambert) said that in his opinion a terrible job was done. That is his opinion and he is entitled to it. In my constituency a map was prepared by the commission. It was duly advertised in the newspapers. The group in the constituency which did not feel this was a good electoral arrangement, that the community of interest had no geographical background and there were certain geographical disadvantages in the arrangement, made representations at the public hearing in the normal way. The commission saw fit to change the map and bring it more into line with what we historically had in that area for electoral boundaries. I feel that the system works very well. It certainly did in the Algoma federal riding in the 1966 redistribution of seats.

One problem facing constituencies in northern Ontario is the very large area which they attempt to encompass. This is because of section 12 of the act which sets out the way in which the number of members will be calculated in each province. It states that there shall be 261 members from the provinces and two from the territories. It provides special instances, like Prince Edward Island which will have a special number, which happens to be four, and provides that certain other criteria will be applied in respect of determining the number of members; for example, no province shall have less than 15 per cent fewer members than in the previous redistribution. There are other special arrangements.

In provinces with very large, growing populations, such as Ontario, the members have to take in a much larger territory. For example, in 1966 I believe the median number of constituents in an Ontario riding was 65,000. It varied 25 per cent up or down from this figure, whereas in Prince Edward Island it was something like 25,000. I understand that when the 1971 census results are in, which will be the basis of the election after 1972, it will be somewhere around 87,000 with a flexibility of 25 per cent up or down.

• (4:30 p.m.)

The government has proposed Bill C-257 which would cover these circumstances, giving an additional number of members to provinces such as Prince Edward Island and Saskatchewan. The added representation would bring the number of members in the House of Commons to above the 263 or 264 we now have. This would certainly work to the advantage of provinces such as Ontario. It would be of special advantage in large northern constituencies of Ontario where there is a sparse population while southern parts of the province have a large and fast-growing population.

The hon. member for Edmonton West said no one was more qualified than a Member of Parliament to make representations concerning constituency boundaries. I tend to agree with him. However, I feel the place for him to make such representations, if he is not satisfied with what is proposed by the commission, would be at the public hearings. There, before a final decision is reached, he could put forward his case and bring people with him to support his views.

Section 20 of the act sets out the manner in which objections can be filed with representation commissioners. It reads as follows:

If within a period of thirty days from the day the copy of the report of any commission for a province is laid before the House of Commons or published pursuant to section 19, an objection in writing, in the form of a motion for consideration by the House of Commons of the matter of the objection, signed by not less than ten members of the House of Commons is filed with the Speaker specifying the provisions of the report objected to and the reasons for the objection, the House of Commons shall, within the first fifteen days next after the expiration of that period that the House of Commons is sitting, take up the motion and consider the matter of the objection, and thereafter the report shall be referred back to the representation commissioner by the Speaker, together with a copy of the objection and of the House of Commons debates with respect thereto, for reconsideration by the commission having regard to the objection.

The procedure to be followed is set out in clear terms. It seems to me that hon. members will know the reasoning of the commission and will be able to set forth their arguments right here in the House of Commons. In conclusion, I do not really see that the proposal before us would do much to prevent objections. There will always be differences of opinion. If an hon. member has already made his case at a public hearing before a decision has been reached, if he is unhappy about a name change, for instance, this can be dealt with in the House of Commons as has been done many times in the past. With regard to the boundaries themselves, we decided several years ago to set up an independent commission to take these things out of politics. I believe we should retain that system.