

Under the system we are bound by, there will be no further appeal, and I can only ask as strongly as possible that our representations be taken seriously.

Mr. Cyril Symes (Sault Ste. Marie): Mr. Speaker, I welcome the opportunity to make a few comments on the report of the Electoral Boundaries Commission for the province of Ontario. I sympathize with the commissioners on their task to redesign the electoral boundaries of the province for the next federal election in 1978.

The commissioners have had the dilemma of trying to reconcile the criterion of representation by population with that of taking into account the geographical size of areas and community of interest, and I, along with many of my colleagues from northern Ontario, was quite upset about the first revision which showed that northern Ontario would lose two seats and that its representation would be reduced from 12 to 10. We argued against that reduction in the number of voices speaking for northern Ontario, which has peculiar interests and needs, and thought we had made some points with the commission. Lo, when it came out with this latest and final draft, this final revision, we were shocked to see that the representation had been reduced by one, but in so doing the boundaries of many ridings had been redesigned to the point where they did not seem to make sense, and one seat, the riding of Thunder Bay, was done away with entirely.

We in the north have strong feelings about the need for keeping up representation in our area of the province. Northern Ontario is a part of a province of vast size. There are great distances between a few major urban centres, and many small towns and villages. The point to be remembered is the great distance and a lack of accessibility, not only between communities but between these communities and the centres of governmental power, whether it be in Toronto or in Ottawa. Therefore, as other hon. members have said, it is important that the citizens of northern Ontario have as strong a voice as possible and as many voices as they can have to speak for their interests. Hence we need as many members of parliament from the north as can be justified on the grounds of population, geography, and community of interest.

We think it is important that our representation be kept at 12 seats because the people of northern Ontario see their members of parliament as ombudsmen, people who deal with many problems of government bureaucracy which the people themselves would be unable to deal with because of their remoteness from the centres of governmental power, the great distances between communities, and their inaccessibility to civil servants. Hence members of parliament provide a very important service on a one to one basis with their constituents.

Members of parliament always play important roles in making representations on behalf of municipalities to government officials, both at the provincial and federal levels. Therefore it is important that members of parliament have a real familiarity with the peculiar needs of the various communities within their constituencies. If we keep reducing the number of members of parliament in northern Ontario, that will mean that the size of the ridings will geographically increase, and one member will have that many more communities to take care of, to familiarize himself with, and to meet their needs equally as he tries to

Electoral Boundaries

meet the needs of many other groups and interests within his constituency.

For my colleagues in northern Ontario who represent rural ridings or farflung ridings I have the greatest admiration and sympathy. It is a very onerous task and a tremendous one for them to represent communities which often are hundreds and hundreds of miles apart.

I represent an urban riding, the city of Sault Ste. Marie. It has been my privilege to represent that riding since 1972, and I find that, like my counterparts in the north, I have a very important role to play as an ombudsman and in making representations to the government. So it was with a great deal of surprise that I saw the final map as drawn up by the commissioners because, out of the blue, I found that part of the city of Sault Ste. Marie was lopped off and put into the rural riding of Algoma. In effect there are two sections of my former riding which now go into the riding of Algoma: the Prince Township area, including the village of Gros Cap, and a large section of ward 1, amounting to a total population of about 11,000 which now would be moved into the federal riding of Algoma.

● (2110)

I cannot fathom the rationale of the commissioners in doing what they did. I can understand their argument. They had to keep a minimum population in northern Ontario ridings, especially Algoma, a rural, sparsely populated riding. They had to keep a minimum of 60,814 voters in the riding. To do this they had to take away part of the population of the city of Sault Ste. Marie, and add it to the rural riding. That makes no sense, especially if one examines the criteria according to which the commissioners are supposed to work.

The province of Ontario, in its redistribution plans, at one time thought of dividing the city, but then thought better. It heard representations from the people of Sault Ste. Marie, heard arguments concerning community of interest, after which the provincial government decided to keep the provincial constituency intact.

The municipal council of Sault Ste. Marie has objected to the proposed plan to put part of the city into the new riding of Algoma, and the majority of residents affected have also objected. They have called and written to me, saying that they cannot see the logic of this proposal, and have nothing in common with the rural riding of Algoma, which is far-flung and contains many small communities. The people in the city who will be included in the new riding of Algoma are upset at the commissioners' decision. I share their concern.

If one compares the urban riding of Sault Ste. Marie with the rural riding of Algoma, one can see that there is little in common between both ridings. Algoma consists of a number of small communities, mainly one-industry towns; many of the industries are foundering. There is great unemployment in the region and the people live economically precarious lives. Hence such communities struggle to survive. They find it difficult to attract new industry. The municipalities are crushed by existing debts, and taxes are increasing. The people of the community are not in the same boat as the people of Sault Ste. Marie. The city is flourishing. It contains a major industry, Algoma Steel, and many subsidiary industries.