

Electoral Boundaries

"The whole idea of regional government was to simplify things," he said. "This (proposal) just complicates matters."

Now we come to the basic principle which guided the members of the Electoral Boundaries Commission, and that is equitable distribution of population. The electoral quotient for Ontario is 81,085. The proposal to place Dunnville in Haldimand-Norfolk meets this criterion. The population of Haldimand-Norfolk is 75,292; and the population of Dunnville, which is 11,500, and we reach the total of 86,792, well below the 25 per cent plus variable which is permitted—101,356. The population of the adjoining Erie district is 79,834. Subtract the population of Dunnville, 11,500, and we are left with a total of 68,334, well above the 25 per cent minus variable permitted—60,814. These figures come from the 1976 report of the Electoral Boundaries Commission for Ontario. It is therefore obvious that the proposed change does not adversely affect the neighbouring riding of Erie from which Dunnville would be removed. There is no domino effect.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I wish to commend the work of the Electoral Boundaries Commission for Ontario under the chairmanship of Mr. Justice Campbell-Grant. With few exceptions, it has met the approval of most members of this House. The commission has grappled with an exceedingly complex problem and produced an excellent report within their terms of reference.

I am satisfied that such a fair minded group of men will see the reasonableness of the case I have put before the House. The facts speak for themselves. Now, being in possession of all the facts, plus the documented opinions of the citizens of Dunville, I am sure they will accede to the wishes of these very concerned people.

Mr. B. Keith Penner (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Science and Technology): Mr. Speaker, the report which has been tabled by the Electoral Boundaries Commission for Ontario is, I contend, an extraordinarily deficient document. It is even questionable whether it properly constitutes a report as defined by the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act. As I had an opportunity to say on another occasion, this document fails to provide reasons for justifying the recommendations made.

Earlier, the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) talked about reasons and said it was a matter of opinion, or of definition, as to what constitutes a reason. In fact, the act is quite specific as to what a reason is: it is a reason justifying a recommendation. That takes it out of the realm of uncertainty and makes it very precise and definite. When a recommendation is made by an Electoral Boundaries Commission, it has to be supported and justified by a reason. Its report is incomplete, or may even be improper, if it fails to comply with this quite specific requirement of the act.

● (1620)

I further suggest that this glaring deficiency placed the citizens of Ontario at a serious disadvantage when they went about making their representations before the commission at the public hearings. In answer to the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre, who suggested that somehow our concern is a selfish one on the part of members of this chamber, I would say "Not at all." We are here speaking for citizens, and the citizens whom we represent

[Mr. Knowles (Norfolk-Haldimand).]

were at a disadvantage in expressing their views as to the recommendations of the commission because they had no reasons before them on which they could argue either for or against.

This lack of reasons also hampers members of parliament from Ontario in addressing themselves to the proposals of the commission in this debate. Hence, some of us have argued that this debate ought not really to have taken place at all. The failure of the Ontario commission to comply with the requirements of the statute has produced a reasonable measure of doubt about the validity of the redistribution process that has taken place to date in the province of Ontario. This is a serious situation. It is so serious that something really ought to be done to remove the uncertainty created by the raising of this issue.

I would think there are at least three things that could be done to remove this cloud of doubt that hangs over the validity of the report of the commission for Ontario. The first is that the commission for Ontario ought itself, in order to protect its own integrity, to recall its own report. It ought to do the job that parliament asked it to do.

Mr. Gillies: It did.

Mr. Penner: I did not. It did not supply reasons justifying its recommendations.

Mr. Gillies: It certainly did.

Mr. Penner: It should, therefore, take the report back, supply reasons and hold public hearings again so that the citizens of this province have something to which they may address themselves. Similarly, members of parliament may then deal with the report in terms of its justification, rather than simply a map and the description that accompanies it. A description is not a justification. A reiteration of what the act requires is not a justification. To say it has done certain things is not to provide reasons to justify its actions. This it has failed to do.

The hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre said there are five paragraphs under schedule B of the report. So there are, but if you take any one sentence in any of those five paragraphs, you are at a loss to find anything that, by any definition at all, constitutes a reason, much less a reason to justify, which is even stronger, more definite and specific. Secondly, if the commission itself will not recall its own report, perhaps the government ought to consider seeking a reference of this matter to the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections. It is hoped that this committee would recommend appropriate corrective measures which would result in removal of the cloud of doubt which hangs over the validity of the Ontario report.

It would be an interesting and useful exercise for hon. members opposite, who are protesting that everything is according to the act, to go back and look at the proceedings of the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections when they were in the process of examining the amendment of the hon. member for Edmonton West (Mr. Lambert) requiring reasons. At that time, the electoral boundaries commissioner himself said this was a very good idea and that it ought to be done. Members of parliament would then be able to address themselves to the issue in debate in a much more useful and appropriate way, in a way that