

Redistribution Commission

decisions or suggestions, whatever government happens to be in office at the time.

It is actually suggested that they would be independent commissions. We have already seen independent commissions in Canada which reeked of politics. I think that this resolution would likely be partial to political friends, not only on the national or provincial level, but also within the riding. I do not think that the commission should be authorized to act without parliament being held directly responsible, and this means not only the government, but the Canadian parliament.

We are not against redistribution, far from it. As a matter of fact, we know that certain ridings on Montreal island have a very high number of voters, whereas others, like that of Laurier, for instance, the constituency of the Minister of Justice (Mr. Chevrier), has only a small number of them. In fact, there are two or three other ridings on Montreal island which are thinly populated and which are nevertheless represented in the House of Commons. And if a redistribution was made on Montreal island, nobody would object.

But I will never forget the electoral redistribution made in 1947, I believe, when members were invited by the committee on privileges and elections to voice their opinion. I was then the member for Pontiac in this house. The southern limits of the Pontiac constituency extended up to the northern limit of the Hull constituency which made an area of about 300 miles long by 150 miles wide.

At that time, as I have already said, the members were asked to make suggestions. Thereafter, the Pontiac constituency was divided in two parts, one forming the southern part of the Pontiac-Temiscamingue constituency and the other, the new riding of Villeneuve.

Mr. Chairman, I think that before proceeding with redistribution, we should consider the representations of the present members for ridings which will in some way be affected, whether their limits are to be extended or reduced, or whether their population is to be increased or decreased. Anyway, we would not like redistribution to be used as a political football by any party. What we want, in this parliament, is an adequate representation for the Canadian people.

Whether we establish constituencies of 70,000 people, with a margin of 20 per cent above or below that figure, may be an important point. As a matter of fact, it is perhaps an acceptable figure, under the circumstances. But, I repeat that redistribution should not be used as a political football, where political party patronage might play a role, whatever it may be.

Now, we are not here to please our friends or displease our enemies. We are here to legislate in the best interest of the people. I think that all hon. members, beginning with the Secretary of State (Mr. Pickersgill) who is submitting this resolution, are anxious for a good representation and want Canada to be composed of ridings as equal as possible to one another, as far as their territories and populations are concerned.

There is no doubt that the Canadian people will thus be better represented here, even if the number of voters were sometimes to be increased—and I always take the city of Montreal as an example—as it may be the riding of the hon. Minister of Justice (Mr. Chevrier). There might be some advantage for him—as he could have a larger majority—or be more easily defeated. As we do not know which, we shall be content with assumptions.

We want an adequate representation.

I think that this resolution which wants to establish boundary commissions in the various ridings, as well as on the provincial and federal level, will mean a tremendous expense, because new officials and new employees will be needed; if we want to spend such an amount of money, let us make sure that it is not thrown away, but that it is used in the interest of our people and of Canada as a whole.

[Text]

Mr. MacLean (Queens): I should like, first of all, to congratulate the Secretary of State on the manner in which he introduced this important piece of legislation last week. He seemed to have high hopes, after introducing it in such a fine and open way, that the resolution might carry on the day on which it was first considered.

It was with some regret I had to point out to him that there were still a number of speakers who wanted to take part in the debate. I regret the look of chagrin which crossed his face when he realized the measure was not going to pass on that occasion. However, the hon. gentleman should not be entirely surprised that we in the opposition did not accept his attitude at face value. He can hardly blame us for that. We have observed him for a long time in the House of Commons and we have come to the conclusion that he is either a present day disciple of Machiavelli, or else he is constitutionally incapable of refraining from the temptation to strike a low blow at either his colleagues or his opponents, if they place enough faith in him to allow him the opportunity.

Some hon. Members: Shame.