

Electoral Boundaries Commission

regard will tend to fall away if the instruction is not very, very clear as to what are the principles under which this new commission is to operate.

The hon. member for Bonavista-Twillingate put forward the point that the commission should bring its report into the house in the form of a bill, with the boundaries already drawn up. It seems to me this is the only sensible way it can be done. I would only hope that some kind of tradition develops in so far as this particular measure may be concerned and that the party line, as the hon. member suggested, will not be in effect when this particular bill is before the committee that considers it, other than the fact that the members of the committee will, I assume, be apportioned on some kind of basis relative to the party standing in the house.

The other point in relation to the bill as it may be laid before the house, it would seem to me, is the amount of preliminary opportunity that will be given to local groups to make their presentations before the bill is made up. That is, I hope it would be considered practical for the commission to have one or two members move across the country at regular intervals, getting the feel in the various areas about what their needs and wishes are with regard to representation, and that at no time would a substantial change be made in any district without representatives having the opportunity, if possible, on the local scene to make their representations about the way the constituency should be divided.

The measure is one that we would be very happy to support, despite our doubts as to its really being effective in the short run, particularly for the voters in the approaching election.

Mr. Matheson: Mr. Chairman, all of us of course are sympathetic to the principle enunciated in this bill. We regret that a reading of the remarks of the Prime Minister do not appear to indicate any clear answer to complicated problems involved. We find it difficult to understand why, in what appears to be the last hours of this parliament, we are addressing ourselves to one of the most complex matters ever laid before the House of Commons of Canada. Perhaps in the next parliament, with people of the competence of Dr. Pauline Jewett, we might be able to do rather better.

May I refer to some comments of Sir Richard J. Cartwright in his book entitled "Reminiscences". Answering certain questions put to him by a reporter at that time and referring to the classic case of gerrymandering in the election of 1882, he said:

Under pretence of adding four seats to the representation of Ontario they—

[Mr. Fisher.]

That is, Sir John A. Macdonald:

—changed the boundaries of 54 constituencies so that while the Liberal party in Ontario almost exactly divided the popular vote in 1882 and 1887, and had a decisive majority in 1891, they were placed in a large minority in 1882 and 1887 and even in 1891 were kept still in a minority, though, of course, not so large a one. That there may be no possibility of dispute, I give the figures for 1891 from the published statement of Mr. George Johnson, the dominion statistician and a strong Conservative. Mr. Johnson stated the total Liberal vote in Ontario in 1891 to have been 178,871 and the total Conservative vote 171,595, giving a majority of the whole vote of 7,276 in favour of the Liberal party. The result in number of seats was that the Liberals, with a popular majority of 7,276, got 44 seats and the Conservatives, who were in a minority of 7,276, obtained 48. How grave a thing this was can be best understood from the fact that the total Conservative majority in Ontario in 1878 was 7,000, when they carried 59 seats to the Liberals' 29 out of the 88 seats Ontario then possessed.

Mr. Grafftey: Tell us about St. Antoine-Westmount.

Mr. Matheson: Sir Richard indicated that this gerrymander—and I shall not be distracted by the intervention of my hon. friend from Brome-Missisquoi—began in 1882 and it was not done away with until the election of 1904, owing to the refusal of the Senate to alter the constituencies until after the census had been taken.

Mr. Grafftey: Tell us about St. Antoine-Westmount, Moose Jaw-Lake Centre and all those places.

Mr. Pickersgill: Does the hon. member really want to know about Moose Jaw-Lake Centre? I would not advise him to ask about that.

Mr. Matheson: Sir Richard continues:

As the Conservatives had a decided majority in the Senate at that time, we had no alternative but to submit. This meant that for five successive elections, in 1882, 1887, 1891, 1896 and 1900, the Liberal party in Ontario were deprived of their fair share in the representation.

A few hours ago I took the occasion—

Mr. Grafftey: Tell us about St. Antoine-Westmount.

Mr. Matheson: It is difficult to continue with these interventions from my giggling friend from Brome-Missisquoi who is in his seat. May I simply say that as we look back over the records no party can feel more indignant about the whole question of gerrymandering than the Liberal party, and they themselves at different times have learned from these things—

Mr. Grafftey: You are reading history with your blinkers on.

Mr. Matheson: —which were introduced into the history of Canada so effectively by the master gerrymanderer of them all, that