

Senator Corbin: You should have taken part in the debate!

Senator Flynn: Finally, what was the position of Senator MacEachen?

You wanted the system in effect today to continue and thus let the increase continue. Fine. But would the representation of the smaller provinces increase as well? No one has been able to prove this. In fact, the figures that were mentioned and which you used in your arguments, especially Senator Stewart, show that proportionally, and this is important, the position of the smaller provinces would have diminished in any case. However, the proportion in which this occurs is not as great under the proposed system as under the present one.

Is there any difference in principle between the proposed formula and the existing one? There is none, except the numerical result. And I don't want anyone telling me that if we have more members representing fewer people, these people are better served. We are not better served from the territorial point of view, as Senator Robertson pointed out. You can't resolve the territorial problem under the present formula. That is just not true.

The principle that consists of taking account of the territory is in the bill. Twenty-five per cent may be added to or subtracted from the quota to allow for geographical circumstances. But you will never solve the problem of Cape Breton as compared with Manicouagan and the Northwest Territories, that is a joke!

I would even suggest that in many cases the arguments put forward were nothing but pure and simple demagoguery. It is false, it is not the intent of the bill. The bill simply provides that the number of members in the House of Commons will increase more slowly.

Is that not a good principle? Did you know that on the basis of the population—Senator MacEachen mentioned an increase of 7 million—taking the United States as an example, their House of Representatives should have in excess of 3,000 members as compared with our House of Commons?

Still the representative of a large riding will always have problems, and the only way to come to grips with that is to apply the principle which was in the legislation to begin with.

Referring to Clause 6 of the bill:

—but in departing from the application of rule (a)—

Namely the quota.

—the commission shall make every effort to ensure that, except in circumstances viewed by the commission as being extraordinary—

That might be the case of Cape Breton Island.

—the population of each electoral district in the province remains within twenty-five per cent more or twenty-five per cent less of the electoral quota for the province.

That has always been the principle and it is the only way to solve the problem. This bill does not change anything at all.

People complain about the loss of additional seats. The opponents complain because of the seats the provinces will not have as a result of the implementation of the new legislation.

[Senator Flynn.]

However nobody complains about the fact that the proportions are reduced.

Under the existing rule Quebec would automatically have won four seats on the basis of the 1981 census, and four more seats in 1991 and in 2001.

The way things are now Quebec loses those seats. If you add three seats in the Atlantic provinces, as suggested by Senator Stewart, British Columbia will complain. Senator Fairbairn will immediately stand up to defend the cause of Alberta. All the others will complain.

We must keep the essential element, the proportion of representation. In that respect, they seem to have forgotten all about the constitutional provisions.

I think I should read from the British North America Act sections 51A and 52 which are not amended by this bill.

Section 51A:

51A. Notwithstanding anything in this Act a province shall always be entitled to a number of members in the House of Commons not less than the number of senators representing such province.

Since every province has a minimum of representation in the Senate, this certainly provides some protection for the smaller provinces.

Section 52 reads:

52. The number of Members of the House of Commons may be from time to time increased by the Parliament of Canada, provided the proportionate representation of the provinces prescribed by this Act is not thereby disturbed.

The only exception provided in the case of the smaller provinces is in section 51A. There is no other. The additional compensation is representation in the Senate. The Atlantic Provinces have 30 senators. They have more than Quebec, more than Ontario and far more than all of Western Canada. This is a way of correcting the imbalance.

The important thing is, that the proportionate representation referred to in section 52, except for the senatorial minimum which benefits the smaller provinces, remains intact. There is no other way to solve this problem.

Of course we can have a House of Commons with 400 members. If you want more, if there is no problem about increasing the number of members indefinitely, fine.

● (1540)

But if the proportional representation or figures go down, it is not much of an improvement.

The province of Quebec has been steadily losing representation in the House of Commons as a result of shifts in the population. Alberta will become more important, and that is quite normal. Senator Fairbairn says that her province would have had more, but if that were the case, other provinces would have had more as well.

I think the provinces that have a legitimate complaint about the present figures are Quebec, Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia, because the population of these provinces is increasing at a faster rate.