

Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act

province the burden should lie on those who are to make the change or suggest the change. If the name of the constituency is to be changed, the commission should let the constituents know why this is being done. If boundaries are to be extended or contracted or altered, or if this parish or that part of a township is to be removed or added to another constituency, let it be said why that is being done; let it not be merely said that this is done simply on a population basis. What is the affinity—that is the question. Let the commission, to use popular parlance, put its reasons where its mouth is, because then, I can assure hon. members, there will be much less frustration.

In the last revision, that being the first revision under this act, there was not one province without a constituency where there was not complete frustration because the people did not know why a change was made. Why was something done this way or that? Let us have the reasons. I do not have much time, and I propose to give hon. members an opportunity to ask questions. We ask: Why was this done this way?

I will simply say that if there are objections they will be more cogent and, I think, more objective if they are directed toward reasons that are given. I think, too, that in other instances where the reasons appear reasonably sensible most hon. members will accept them and we will not have any objection. This amendment is trying to establish this communication, shall we say, between members of the House and the commission. Hon. members are very much in the picture since they are the ones who are affected.

It must be remembered that under the act hon. members cannot change the reports. That cannot be done in any way, there is no provision for changes under the act. Members of the House can only air their grievances and set up counter-reasons for their objections. Then the reports are referred back to the commissions along with the verbatim report of what was said by hon. members in regard to particular constituencies, and the commissioners will either reject, accept in part the objections or start the work afresh. At least an opportunity is given for Members of Parliament, who I think know more about their constituencies than anybody, to serve their people. Merely representing a constituency for the purposes of election is nonsense. What one has to look at is a constituency which can be properly serviced by a Member of Parliament. That means a lot. In the last revision that was the lowest reason on the totem pole.

I propose merely to amend the definition section of the act to provide that the report shall contain recommendations and that each recommendation can only be considered as a recommendation if there is appended to it the reason therefor. Therefore, any report would come in with recommendations and, naturally, with reasons. That is all. I hope that hon. members will see fit to approve the amendment of this act because a great deal of, shall we say, the future of their constituencies and their ability to serve them lies in determining that we have appropriately determined constituencies.

Mr. Blair: Mr. Speaker, may I have your permission to ask the hon. member a question?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I believe the hon. member has indicated that he will answer questions.

[Mr. Lambert (Edmonton West).]

Mr. Blair: I wonder if the hon. member can tell us whether there is anything in the statute at present which prohibits or shall prohibit a commission from giving reasons for its report and for the division of a province into constituencies.

Mr. Lambert (Edmonton West): No, Mr. Speaker, there is nothing that specifically prohibits that. I have the reports from the last distribution; all are before me and I would offer them to the hon. member in the hope that he might find one solitary, minor reason stated in the whole lot of them. There seems to be a uniformity of presentation. I will not attribute this to the actions of the representation commissioner who is a member of all the representation commissions. Let me assure the hon. member, however, that there is a rather rigid uniformity in presentation, and all without a single reason.

I know that when I spoke to a couple of the chairmen of provincial commissions and suggested that reasons would have been helpful, they simply said it was not necessary and "why should we bother our heads with it?"

Mr. Maurice Foster (Algoma): Mr. Speaker, I should like to add a few words to the debate on Bill C-44, in the name of the hon. member for Edmonton West (Mr. Lambert). It refers to the electoral boundaries commissions and the reports they file with the Secretary of State. The hon. member suggests in his bill that these reports should give not only the boundaries of constituencies but reasons for establishing those boundaries and the way in which they are established.

It took many years, Mr. Speaker, for the Parliament of Canada to get around to developing an independent commission to fix electoral boundaries independent of Parliament and independent of politics. This was done in 1964. It was a great step forward. Prior to that time there were a tremendous number of complaints and criticisms about setting the boundaries to suit the political advantage of the government in power. The whole idea of an independent commission was to get away from this type of criticism.

• (4:20 p.m.)

The hon. member stated that we do not have a completely independent boundary set-up as a result of this commission. The arguments and complaints against this are now much fewer than in the past. By setting out the reasons for establishing boundaries the commission invites rebuttal from Members of Parliament. In effect, we established a continuing debate. It took many years to get this matter out of the hands of the government and into the hands of an independent commission. By this proposal we are bringing it back as though the commission is only a bargaining body, and inviting members of the House of Commons to rebut this. Obviously, the reasons which the commission will give will be those set out in section 13 of the act, which states the reasons for establishing the boundaries. I quote that section:

In preparing its report each commission for a province shall be governed by the following rules:

(a) the division of the province into electoral districts and the description of the boundaries thereof shall proceed on the basis that the population of each electoral district in the province as a result thereof shall correspond as nearly as may be to the electoral