

Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Suspension

did a very good job. What concerns me about all this is that I am well aware, along with other hon. members, that we are never going to get "rep by pop" in its ideal form.

● (1640)

We have a set of ridings now in this bill and I anticipate that we will have the same ridings for perhaps three or four years while we study this question based on the census figures of 1961. We can hardly fail to recognize that there have been vast changes in where we live, whatever the motivating factors may be. The point is there have been changes, and they are not reflected in our electoral boundaries. The answer may be to have a review, or it may entail increasing the number of seats in this House. I am not sure that I could support that. For our population I think Canadians are supporting enough members of parliament and 264 of us can do an adequate job. I do not think we need 300. But that may be so.

How are we going to get around the constitutional problem? The province of Prince Edward Island is a classic case. With fewer electors than my riding of Fraser Valley West, because of a constitutional commitment it sends four members to Ottawa while my riding sends one. This means that the people of Prince Edward Island—some of whom are my relatives; very fine people—have four times the voting clout of the people in my riding. The other extreme is my colleague from the Northwest Territories who represents, geographically, one-third of Canada. Within these two widely separated extremes we can see that on the basis of any kind of idea of "rep by pop" we have a long way to go before it is achieved.

There are approximately 130,000 people in my riding. By the time we get around to changing this in terms of redistribution, if we support this bill there will perhaps be 160,000 or 170,000. I think it is unfair to expect one person, in his role of ombudsman, to represent 160,000 people or, in Scarborough East, 190,000 people. I realize that distances or sparse population all have their implications, but rhetorically I should like to ask why we cannot accept the boundaries as articulated by the redistribution commissions across Canada after suitable debate, and conduct our constitutional review at the same time? I do not see why one has to be held up to accomplish the other.

We may need a different basis for fixing boundaries. I do not see why my province of British Columbia—and this is true of the province of Ontario and one other province—has to be denied seats during the period this review is taking place. That is my basic concern and I think it is a basic concern of those whose provinces are gaining population. Certainly I can recognize the concern of Saskatchewan. Because of the senatorial floor, Saskatchewan could well end up with the same number of seats as New Brunswick and yet have twice the population.

There are anomalies in the whole thing, Mr. Speaker, but I still have not heard an answer to my own satisfaction. That is why I will not support this bill. I still have not had the basic question answered as to why, in order to accomplish this review, we cannot let the redistribution go ahead. Does it mean that the work of the commission or the study of this whole question in our country has suddenly to be put in limbo? If that question can be answered

[Mr. Rose.]

satisfactorily, I might change my mind; but I do not see that these two things are necessarily tied together.

I said I was not going to speak very long, Mr. Speaker. These are my basic remarks and the reasons why I, as a British Columbian and one who represents an urban riding, am not content to have this matter delayed. The people I represent have to vote in a riding which was fundamentally drawn on the basis of what the population was 15 years ago, and I think it is unfair.

Right Hon. J. G. Diefenbaker (Prince Albert): Mr. Speaker, I rise to make a few observations. I brought this matter before the House on January 11 in a question to the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) when I said:

It has to do with the redistribution that is now being considered by committees which I understand are meeting in the various provinces. In view of the fact that several provinces—Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, Quebec, Manitoba and Saskatchewan—will be losing membership unless there is an amendment to the British North American Act, has consideration been given by the government to bringing in an address to the end that membership in these various provinces will not fall below the present level and to achieve that either by a directive or by increasing the size of the membership in the House as I believe was done in the forties?

The answer given by the Prime Minister was:

Mr. Speaker, some thought has been given within the government to such a matter. I would be prepared to pursue that thought. I feel that unless the legislation or the amendment were retroactive it would probably be impossible to do anything about the electoral reform action which is now in process. But I will look into that aspect of the matter too. I do know that this is an important problem for many provinces in Canada. It does involve an amendment to the British North America Act and that is no easy undertaking.

On January 24, I again brought the matter up and the Prime Minister at that time stated:

Mr. Speaker, I think the view which would prevail would probably be that under section 91(1) of the BNA Act it could be done by statute of parliament... but I do realize, Mr. Speaker, that the other view could be held by people who believe it to be in provincial interests.

I will just quote a portion of my next question which was:

Does the Prime Minister suggest that a change can be made in the membership of the House, in view of the provisions in the British North America Act as well as all amendments to that act that have taken place, by the simple act of a statute passed by this parliament? Does he say that the law officers of the Crown have that view? If he does, it is the end of the constitution.

Apparently the government has worked out a plan which I think meets the needs of the moment. Certainly the situation is becoming worse and worse when provinces are losing their membership because of the tremendous migration from the country to the city. I think the summary made by the hon. member for Lotbinière (Mr. Fortin) was exceptionally well reasoned and indicated the situation in his province and generally, I think, across the country.

What we are doing, in effect, is not facing up to this matter at all but simply postponing consideration so that the whole question can be dealt with after more mature thought than can be given to it at this time. What we are in fact doing is preparing for the next election, which is not very far away if the information I have had within the last few days is correct, that in the various urban seats