

Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Suspension

urban members as to the reasons for which rural people oppose the present proposals for redistribution. The reason rural members are concerned is that they feel the act has not been adhered to. They feel that the proposals which were put forward by the various provincial commissions failed to pay attention to the tolerance figures.

Since I am a member from Manitoba, I will use Manitoba as an example. The redistribution act states that to establish a population quota for a riding one takes the total population of the province concerned and divides it by the designated number of seats in that province. In the case of Manitoba one divides 12 into the total population, and the quota for a riding works out at approximately 82,000 people. The act states that because there is a greater concentration of voters in a metropolitan riding a tolerance of 25 per cent above this quota is allowed. Rural ridings are allowed a tolerance of minus 25 per cent below the 82,000 quota because of the large land area covered by most of them.

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We are against the redistribution proposals because they completely disregard the tolerance figures allowed in the act. In the case of Manitoba we can consider the different rural ridings an example. The new proposal for the riding of Brandon-Souris gives a population of 84,000, or close to 85,000, which is 3 per cent over the tolerance allowance, yet it is a rural riding in all respects. Another example is the riding of Churchill, Manitoba, which is only 18 per cent below the allowable tolerance figure, yet Churchill is the second largest riding in Canada.

We have huge rural ridings in Manitoba, such as Dauphin, Provencher and Portage, which are anywhere from 6 per cent to 4 per cent below the tolerance allowance. I think in respect of any riding as large as these we could come up with a proposal that would give at least a 20 per cent tolerance. This is the way the act was written, to give protection to these rural areas.

In respect of an urban-rural riding the situation is far more extreme under the Alberta proposal. In that province we can see as an example that there are five ridings in the city of Calgary with an average size of 85,000 people. The riding of Calgary Centre has a population of only 81,000, and we know it is difficult for a riding to increase its size in the centre of a major city like that.

The same is true of the city of Edmonton, which has five ridings with an average population of 85,000. Let us look at the rural riding proposals for Alberta. We have the Banff-Drumheller riding which is completely rural and has a population of over 87,000. We have the Battle River riding which is completely rural with a population of close to 95,000, about 12,000 larger than the average Calgary riding. One could go right down the list of proposals for Alberta. The proposed Wetaskiwin-Yellowhead riding would have a population of over 91,000.

I think it is obvious that the commissions in the different provinces have completely disregarded the protection which is accorded the rural areas by the 25 per cent tolerance allowance.

When speaking at the time of second reading of this legislation I pointed out that Manitoba ends up with only three really rural ridings. Only three ridings in Manitoba

[Mr. Stewart (Marquette).]

under the proposals do not touch the greater Winnipeg area, namely Brandon-Souris, Churchill and Dauphin. There are nine ridings which come completely within the boundaries of greater Winnipeg. This means that nine of our 12 ridings are connected to greater Winnipeg, and it means also that it is quite possible that nine of the 12 members from Manitoba would be living in the greater Winnipeg area. This is not right when you consider that half the population of Manitoba still lives in rural areas. These rural areas are entitled to six rural seats, and I mean truly rural seats. The commission has completely disregarded this in its proposals.

When this legislation is passed, as I am sure it will be, I would hope that the committees set up to review redistribution will have a long look at Canada's population growth in the last 30 years, and also its growth ratio to the number of seats in the House of Commons.

The 1941 census showed Canada with a population of just over 11 million. At that time there were 245 members in the House of Commons. The 1951 census indicated our population was over 14 million and the membership at that time was increased to 265 members. The 1961 census showed we had a population of over 18 million and at that time the membership was 264. The 1971 census showed a population of over 21 million but we still have only 264 seats in the House.

Other countries of the world have made adjustments in their parliamentary representation, and I believe it is very necessary at this time for Canada to increase its membership in the House so each area in this nation has fair representation.

There is one other point I objected to strongly having to do with the different commissions set up across the country, and I hope there will be amendments to overcome this. In the case of Manitoba, when the electoral boundaries commission was set up there was not one representative from a rural area. From the results I think this is obvious, because the rural areas were definitely ignored. The rural areas will have three representatives out of 12, yet half the population of Manitoba lives in the rural areas.

The rural areas in Canada are not asking for special status. We are asking to be given the representation to which we are entitled under the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act. I hope my few remarks will give the urban areas a better understanding of our concerns. Because of the concerns I have expressed I am opposed to the amendment and I intend to support the bill.

Mr. John M. Reid (Parliamentary Secretary to President of the Privy Council): Mr. Speaker, I just want to make a very few brief remarks as to why the time of 18 months was outlined in the bill. The reason for 18 months, or 17 months in actual fact because of the delay in passing this bill, is quite simple. When the President of the Privy Council (Mr. MacEachen) appeared before the Parliamentary Committee on Privileges and Elections, he indicated that when this bill was passed he would be prepared to make a formal statement to the committee, in the fall, giving the government's position on a possible package for redistribution. That means there would be proposals for the committee to discuss at that time.