

## Oral Questions

**Hon. Mitchell Sharp (Secretary of State for External Affairs):** Mr. Speaker, I have not yet perused the documents themselves. They arrived in Ottawa just a few minutes before the House met. However, I am advised that they do provide for the calling of an international conference 30 days from the date of the truce and that, if we were a member of the international commission, we would be invited. The other members would be the permanent members of the Security Council, plus the belligerents in Viet Nam.

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[Translation]

## HOUSE OF COMMONS

## REDISTRIBUTION OF RIDINGS SUGGESTED AMENDMENT OF BRITISH NORTH AMERICA ACT TO MAINTAIN PRESENT LEVEL OF MEMBERSHIP IN CERTAIN PROVINCES

**Mr. Gérard Laprise (Abitibi):** Mr. Speaker, I should like to put a question to the Prime Minister.

Could he tell the House whether the government is considering the possibility of amending the Canadian constitution in order to increase the number of members, so that certain provinces will not be without an adequate representation in parliament after the next redistribution?

**Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister):** Mr. Speaker, I think that I said last week or the week before that the problem had actually been drawn to the attention of the cabinet which is now considering it. As I then pointed out, the House must understand that one of the solutions would be to increase substantially the number of members and that the ratio of members would still be the same, regardless of their number, because under the constitution and also in all fairness, I believe, representation must be proportional to the population.

Consequently, even though the total number of members were increased, the ratio would remain the same.

## REDISTRIBUTION OF RIDINGS—SUGGESTION THAT QUEBEC REPRESENTATION BE USED AS BASIS

**Mr. André Fortin (Lotbinière):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the right hon. Prime Minister if, among the schemes considered by the cabinet, there is one which could be based on a quotient established in the province of Quebec, by constituency, and which would be used to establish the number of members for other provinces so that the number of members would be increased and the representation would be more equitable.

**Mr. Trudeau:** Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member does recall, the formula he suggests was prevailing at the beginning of the constitution of Canada and had been ratified by the British North America Act of 1867. Previous parliaments have altered the formula so that the number of Quebec members would not be fixed but could differ from the other provinces. I do not think that hon. members would wish to go back to the previous situation as suggested by the hon. member.

[Mr. Douglas.]

[Later:]

[English]

## REDISTRIBUTION OF RIDINGS—MAINTENANCE OF PRESENT LEVEL OF MEMBERSHIP IN CERTAIN PROVINCES BY ADDRESS TO WESTMINSTER OR PASSAGE OF STATUTE

**Right Hon. J. G. Diefenbaker (Prince Albert):** Mr. Speaker, this question is directed to the Prime Minister and is related to the answer he has just given, as well as the one he gave me last week, respecting increasing the number of members in the chamber, thereby avoiding the necessity of there being any reduction in the representation of the provinces of Newfoundland, Quebec, Nova Scotia, Manitoba and Saskatchewan. In view of the fact that consideration is being given to this by the government, in the event that a change is to be made, has the government in mind having an address passed by parliament to the parliament at Westminster to make the necessary constitutional change—

**Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre):** It isn't necessary.

**Mr. Diefenbaker:** —or has consideration been given to whether such changes could be made by a statute passed by this parliament? I do not accept that, but I wonder if consideration is being given to it?

**Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister):** 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—

**Some hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Trudeau:** —but I do realize, Mr. Speaker, that the other view could be held by people who believe it to be in provincial interests. I must say that this problem has not been studied to this point by the government. It is one on which studies have been made in the past. I do not think that it is really the difficult problem facing this House. The difficult problem, as I just stated in my answer to the hon. member who belongs to the Social Credit party, is to realize that even if we increased the number of members in the House of Commons the provinces with lesser populations or lessening populations would still have the same proportion, or a lesser proportion of members, compared with those provinces that have increasing populations.

**Mr. Diefenbaker:** Mr. Speaker, I wish to ask a supplementary question in order to be perfectly clear. 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.

**Mr. Baldwin:** They will probably do it by Governor General's warrant.