

*Electoral Boundaries*

ples on which is based this legislation under which the electoral boundaries are readjusted every ten years.

Mr. Speaker, when he tried to defend himself against the reflections cast on him by the Prime Minister of Canada (Mr. Trudeau), the Quebec premier indicated recently that it was essential for the survival of Canada to have in its constitution official guarantees for Quebec within Canada and the Confederation. Yet, the act governing the change and readjustment of electoral boundaries seems to support those who predict a rather bleak future for Quebec within Canada, since we have to admit that it is simple matter of mathematics. Because of this review of the Electoral Boundaries Act, Quebec's representation is reduced from 28 per cent to 26 per cent. This reduced number of Quebec representatives in Parliament bears out those who simply advocate a complete review of the constitution and even the isolation of Quebec.

● (2110)

This legislation proves they are right since even though the province of Quebec gets one, extra seat, its number of seats increasing from 74 to 75, one must not forget nevertheless that we will only be 75 out of 282. Mr. Speaker, this point has not been emphasized strongly enough, in my view, since the sense and the very nature of our country are being gradually destroyed. Should there be as a result a one way immigration in Canada, that is to say an immigration movement almost exclusively out of the province of Quebec, within the next 10 years the electoral boundaries would have to be readjusted once more and Quebec would fall to 20 percent. Within another period of 10 years, it would be reduced to 15 percent and after that, it would be the end of our existence within this country.

Mr. Speaker, I think this point is extremely important and had to be emphasized. I am therefore basically opposed to this method of continuously readjusting electoral boundaries. Moreover, I would even question the ability of those who were responsible for establishing these boundaries.

Mr. Speaker, here, I weigh my every word: when one considers this is the third attempt at redistribution and that the said commissioners have not learned as yet where to draw these boundaries, I think one is entitled to ask serious questions, especially when these people tell us precisely, and I quote from Schedule D of the report they submitted to us, that they considered all factors in their specific and general applications and that the aims of the proposal are as follows:

1. to maintain municipalities as a whole wherever possible;

The hon. member for Lachine-Bord-du-Lac (Mr. Blaker) described how the city of Lachine was split up.

2. to compensate for the sparsity of population in certain regions, for example, Gaspésie, Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean and Abitibi—Pontiac—Témiscamingue by using for these regions a considerably lower electoral quota than that applied to the urban areas:

And finally, the third aim:

3. to attempt to group, if possible, populations who have a community of interests, be they economic, social or ethnic.

If we objectively consider the proposed boundaries, we must admit that these aims were not reached, as if on purpose. To name only one, the municipal entity was not

[Mr. Matte.]

preserved, this was not in several constituencies. Secondly, three regions were mentioned where the sparsity of population and the geographical vastness must be taken into account. Well, what happened in that case? The hon. member for Papineau (Mr. Ouellet) mentioned it briefly a moment ago, a vast territory, northwest Quebec or Abitibi, becomes a small territory, its representation is reduced from three to two constituencies, which is absurd. A constituency larger than many provinces is created, all that is included in one riding, so that two ridings are made out of the previous three, a vast territory is contained in one riding, with a population of 88,000.

That is far from the original objective, since it is acknowledged when an area is that large the population could be below the average, but this is much beyond the average, and I cannot understand how such acrobatics.

Of course, when the population is concentrated, when the demographic density is high, it is generally recognized as a determining factor. It is well known that in a riding which is about one square mile, one normally finds a population of 90,000 95,000 and even 100,000. That is quite normal. Agreed.

But given that principle, how is it that the area of particular concern to me, the riding of Trois-Rivières, has become an exclusively urban riding with a population less than a riding as large as a province, like the riding of Champlain. I cannot understand anything. The riding of Trois-Rivières now has a population of 70,000 next to a vast rural riding, which is 350 miles from north to south with a population of 80,000.

Mr. Speaker, I was most surprised when I found that out, all the more as I question the competence of the commissioners. In August, I had the opportunity to appear before the commission in Trois-Rivières and I found at that time that the chairman of the commission, even though the matter was under study since 1971, did not even know where La Tuque was located. Mr. Speaker, the chairman of the commission was in that area to hear representations from a certain number of ridings but he did not know where the main city in the riding of Champlain was located.

Mr. Speaker, these results show that the matter was dealt with lightly if all the briefs and hearings ended in this freak report. Mr. Speaker, I must simply infer that the commissioners are incompetent.

Not only do I question the basic principle, but I think that the act should be amended because to go on like this would simply result in the destruction of a national entity called the French Canadians and the Quebecers. If we keep on readjusting the electoral boundaries exclusively on the basis of demographic factors, the Canadian entity we would like to preserve is doomed. There is much more truth in this than it seems. I refer precisely to what the Quebec Premier said only a few weeks ago. This is my main concern.

Besides, I must say, with supporting evidence, that those who drew those electoral boundaries are totally incompetent. They do not know their business and they set out with very lofty aims on purpose, and then they did their best to ignore them. I wonder why. Is it because they would like to start all over again.