

*Electoral Boundaries*

Edward Island and New Brunswick and Manitoba and Saskatchewan. The former two provinces had floors of four and ten. Manitoba and Saskatchewan had their senatorial floor set at six, but had the protection that they could never have fewer members than a province having lesser population. Thus it was possible for Manitoba and Saskatchewan to go down to ten, the same as New Brunswick.

This new formula calls for all six of the small provinces to be linked together. The number of seats to be assigned to each of the small provinces is determined by dividing the number of seats that the six provinces had after the last redistribution into the total population of those six provinces under the new census figures. So, the populations of Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick are brought into the total population of the six small provinces. That is why Manitoba and Saskatchewan will go up to 14 instead of the 13 we have now, while Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick will remain the same. In other words, the population of those six smaller provinces is taken together, except that the four and ten floor was already there for Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick. It does not put us on a directly proportional basis but it lessens the feeling of disproportion between those two provinces and the two prairie provinces to which I have referred.

I think an arrangement has been worked out that should see us through a few decades, and I think it will be looked upon as an improvement over what we had.

I said earlier that there were one or two other things that might have been included in this bill. One that has been referred to by the President of the Privy Council is the matter of the Northwest Territories. We long ago accepted the proposition that the people of the Yukon and the Northwest Territories should have representation in this House despite the smaller population in those parts of Canada. In the case of the Northwest Territories my friend from that area has told us, as he has told the House, of the terrific job it is to try to represent 36,000 people scattered over almost 1½ million square miles. I asked him the other day if he would not feel lonely if he had to cover only 750,000 square miles. He said that he would, but in the interests of the people he thought it was a good idea.

The hon. member for Northwest Territories (Mr. Firth) has before the House a private member's bill, C-299. I hope the President of the Privy Council will examine it and, perhaps it might be referred to the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections along with any bill that the government introduces. This has been a major concern of the member for Northwest Territories since he came here. He is anxious for a system that would be more fair to the people in the north. I join him in welcoming the announcement made today. When this goes before the committee I hope Bill C-299 will be referred along with the bill the government plans to place before us.

I am glad that the President of the Privy Council emphasized the fact—I thought the hon. member for Dauphin was confusing the two things—a little—that this bill deals only with the number of members to be assigned to each province. The hon. member said that after the map came out last time there was a good deal of concern, part of it was concern over the way the boundaries were drawn

[Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre).]

and part of it was the sudden realization that it was really true that provinces like Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Nova Scotia that were going to suffer a decline in the number of their seats. It was a combination of the two things that brought on the concern that led to the delaying bill we passed some months ago.

In this bill we are not dealing with the question of how the lines are drawn inside the provinces. We are not touching a principle that I feel is by now sacred. It took a long time to get it, but it is there. That is the provision that the lines shall not be drawn by members who have a conflict of interest, shall not be done by a committee, and particularly shall not be drawn by a government, but shall be drawn by independent commissions. I recognize all the arguments that members will want to make before those commissions, but the fundamental fact that these lines inside the provinces are drawn independently of the operation of parliament is something I am glad we won, and I am glad it is still there.

I know that in this bill part of the complicated language is there to make it clear that the work done under the old formula is now null and void, that the commissioners are going to start all over again except, of course, that it is declared that they have had referred to them the reports on population and so on.

● (1630)

All told, Mr. Speaker, I think a good job has been done; but I am not handing a bouquet to the minister or to the government because, as he himself said, this bill represents the thinking of the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections of the minority parliament. I think it is good to see some of the things which were initiated in that minority parliament being carried forward in this one, and we are ready to give Bill C-36 its second reading and send it to the Standing Committee.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. André Fortin (Lotbinière):** Mr. Speaker, I wish to congratulate the President of the Privy Council (Mr. Sharp) for having introduced Bill C-36 which is entitled:

An Act to provide for representation in the House of Commons, to establish electoral boundaries commissions and to remove the temporary suspension of the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act.

Bill C-36, Mr. Speaker—I think it is necessary to recall—has some historic significance. Indeed, a bill to establish electoral boundaries commissions has already been introduced in the House. Such a commission acted under the legislation then enforced on the basis of the 1971 decennial census and with the former procedure used in Canada to establish the electoral boundaries throughout the provinces. As a result, the Quebec representation had two fewer members, Newfoundland, one member less, while Ontario had three members more, one member less in Manitoba and Saskatchewan but three members more in British Columbia.

This formula of course satisfied only a few individuals. Thus a group of members in each province agreed to file a notice of objection to the House against the old distribution procedure.

On June 7, 1973, I had the privilege, together with the hon. member for Témiscamingue (Mr. Caouette), to join