

Electoral Boundaries

ues to drop and immigration slows down. Similarly, if immigration speeds up this could create various anomalies.

Therefore, one suggestion which partly emanated from this side of the House but which I think was acceptable to all sides was that for the parliament of 1979 there be an automatic review, which I think is a step forward. Instead of stopping the clock, as we did this time, and losing a good six months to a year in drawing the new boundaries based on the 1971 census, the parliament of 1979 will be charged with looking into the matter. On receiving the population statistics in July, 1982, they will then have three years to study this problem; they will know pretty closely what the population of Canada is going to be and take immediate action. Certainly, I think they will have a great advantage over us in this parliament in dealing with the question of redistribution.

While the addition of 17 seats will strain the confines of the House, the increase is still within reason. Having had experience of these additional seats, the parliament of 1979 will be charged with making the decision whether or not to continue the amalgam theory which seeks automatically to increase the size of the House in step with population growth. I believe the present legislation is acceptable. Some useful amendments were made, and most of all we have left the door open to give a future parliament adequate time to consider the over-all problem. However, I am sure that the problem of redistribution will continue to be a perennial and difficult one.

Mr. Harvie Andre (Calgary Centre): Mr. Speaker, I join the hon. member for Dauphin (Mr. Ritchie) in welcoming third reading of this bill in the hope that we can put the issue behind us for a while and turn our attention to other matters. I rise for only a few minutes to indicate once more, for the sake of the record, why we as a party voted against the bill on second reading and why this party is prepared to accept the bill at this stage as a compromise solution.

Our first and most serious objection to the bill as a party was to its provisions calling for an increase in the size of the House of Commons. We do not feel, as a party, that the efficiency or effectiveness of the House of Commons or the parliamentary process in Canada is enhanced by an increase in the size of the House. In addition, the method as adopted not only calls for an increase now but has built into it a structure which automatically increases the size of the House of Commons at every census and increases the size in a rather erratic manner, if I may use that expression.

● (2100)

The increase projected after the 1981 census, based on the figures available to the committee in the last parliament, would have a House of Commons with 294 members. As a result of the newer projections on population growth by Statistics Canada, the House of Commons would increase in size to 307 members, an additional 13, even though the total population of Canada as now projected would be even less than the figures we worked with originally. So there is something structurally wrong with the method. I think I have identified the structural inequi-

[Mr. Ritchie.]

ties of this method, and that was another reason we voted against the bill on second reading.

The third reason we voted against the bill was the fact that it was plainly inequitable to the two westernmost provinces of Alberta and British Columbia. There were two other reasons. The fourth reason, in my opinion, was that we had insufficient opportunity to examine the proposed method of redistribution, that is, the amalgam method or, indeed, any other alternative before the bill was brought in.

The fifth reason we were against it was in respect of the over-all and more general question of representation of the regions in Canada. At some time we will have to address ourselves to this problem of how the regions should be represented. We are neither a unitary nor a federal state. There is a growing tendency in this country—it is of concern at least to some of us—on the part of people living in regions remote from Ottawa to look less to their central government for guidance and redress of grievances and more and more to their provincial governments. One of the consequences has been the increased importance of federal-provincial conferences in terms of a political forum and, indeed, in many ways parliament has become secondary to this forum. This, to me, is a distressing trend and a problem which is ultimately associated with representatives in the House of Commons and in the Senate and with the activities of members of the other place. This is something we will have to pay attention to at some stage.

As the hon. member for Dauphin pointed out that there were some important amendments introduced at the committee stage which now make it possible for us to support the bill. One of the important amendments was the redefining of intermediate provinces and the manner of calculating the number of seats that Alberta and British Columbia shall have. This was redefined in an equitable manner and resulted in these provinces getting one additional seat each above the original proposal.

More important than that, although that is of considerable importance, there is an automatic review called for by the 1979 parliament. I think that is very important. It is disappointing to me that the committee did not see fit to adopt an amendment I had proposed, which would have had the effect of eliminating this automatic increase in the size of the House. We will have to leave this to the 1979 parliament. But this puts that parliament in the position of having to act in a negative manner rather than a positive one. That was a mistake and I am sorry that is the way it was left by the committee.

There are other vitally important questions which remain. The question of representation of the regions of Canada is something we had no opportunity to discuss and I think that is regrettable. I hope there will be some opportunity during this parliament to discuss this important matter prior to the emergence of even greater divisions within our confederation than those which now exist. I think it is worth while reiterating, for the record, that we in the Progressive Conservative Party regret and oppose the increase in the size of the House of Commons. We do not believe the people of Canada will be well served by this increase, but in view of the amendment calling for