

in accord with our theory of free representative government.

The proposals in the bill now before us really afford, for the first time, I think, a good opportunity—perhaps not a perfect opportunity, but a very good one—to get away from that unsound practice.

There is one point only upon which I have any reservation, and that is in bringing the Speaker of the House of Commons into the matter of making appointments to these commissions.

The Speaker of the House of Commons, by long tradition—certainly in the Mother of Parliaments at Westminster, and we have been moving steadily toward it in this country—should be someone who is always above the party battles. It will be interesting to see how this works out, but I would regret very much indeed if the Speaker, with the best intentions in the world, became the object of criticism by any political party because of the appointments he had made to these various provincial commissions. That would be most regrettable. However, probably this is the only way out of the dilemma at the present time. I have no doubt that the Speaker, irrespective of what party he belongs to, will try to do a thorough job in regard to these appointments and that, as far as he can, he will get men who will approach their responsibility with the high purpose with which they should meet it.

There were two other points. The tolerance between constituencies is probably a sound basis. Certainly, Senator Power gave illustrations of the wide discrepancies that exist, not only between rural and urban but between urban constituencies as well, discrepancies that certainly call for remedial action. But how is the unit of representation arrived at?

Under our constitution, Quebec was given a fixed number of constituencies—that has been altered since—and the total population of the country was divided by that number of seats, which happened for years to be 65, so that the total population in Canada divided by 65 gave the unit of representation. Then, with that unit as a base, there were, of course, the wide tolerances that not infrequently but very frequently arose. So my first question is: How is the unit of representation arrived at?

Then there is a second matter, that if the unit of representation is, say for illustration, 40,000, how will that affect a province like Prince Edward Island? If that basis were strictly adhered to, Prince Edward Island would lose a seat. Is there a provision in this bill comparable to the old provision in the B.N.A. Act that the representation of a province in the House of Commons cannot drop below its representation in the Senate?

Hon. Mr. Power: Section 52 of the British North America Act says:

The Number of Members of the House of Commons may be from Time to Time increased by the Parliament of Canada, provided the proportionate Representation of the Provinces prescribed by this Act is not thereby disturbed.

Section 51A says:

Notwithstanding anything in this Act a province shall always be entitled to a number of members in the House of Commons not less than the number of senators representing such province.

Hon. Mr. Crerar: That answers my question.

To sum up very briefly, I think this is a forward step. It may be experimental in some respects, but it is by the process of trial and error in matters of this kind that we ultimately reach perfection. As far as I am concerned, I am very glad to see that this progressive step has been taken in effecting the redistribution of our federal constituencies.

Hon. Walter M. Aseltine: Honourable senators, I am rather disturbed concerning the effect this bill might have on the representation from the Province of Saskatchewan. We now have 17 constituencies, many of which are very large. For example, in central Saskatchewan the Rosetown-Biggan constituency is 100 miles square. When redistribution takes place, and we are probably obliged to take in all of Kindersley in order to have the required population in that area to constitute a seat, the new constituency will be 150 miles long and 100 miles wide. In the northern part of Saskatchewan the constituencies extend as far as the 60th parallel of latitude. In some cases that is a distance of 200 miles.

Can the sponsor of the bill tell us exactly what is going to happen in a case of that kind, where the distances are so great? Will the geography of the country be taken into consideration?

Hon. Mr. Power: All I can do is quote section 13(c) (i) of the bill itself, which says that if

special geographic considerations, including in particular the sparsity, density or relative rate of growth of population of various regions of the province, the accessibility of such regions or the size or shape thereof, appear to the commission to render such a departure necessary or desirable,

That is, from the general rule of equal representation—then the commission may depart from the strict application of the rules.

Hon. Mr. Aseltine: It appears such circumstances will be taken into consideration.