

Electoral Boundaries Commissions

I should like to put them so we can consider both sides of the question.

It is quite true, as hon. members such as the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre, who have been in the house for a long time, will recall, that at almost every redistribution the question of dividing Halifax and dividing Queens comes up, and in the end this is not done. At least the hon. gentleman said it was done long ago, but it has not been done for a long time. There is a certain pattern, and I think that is true in both places. Perhaps I am a little more familiar with the kind of considerations which were put to me so strongly and so recently by the hon. member for Halifax in connection with conventions in Halifax applying not merely in the federal field but in the municipal and provincial fields as well. I think all of us would be very reluctant to disturb considerations of this sort by general legislation unless there is a strong argument on the other side.

Now, Mr. Chairman, I think there is a strong argument on the other side. It is much stronger in the case of Halifax than in the case of Queens, but I think it applies in both cases. In the case of Halifax, by itself Halifax county, not taking into account the relative rates of growth, would be almost entitled to three members. So if the law is to be followed there is no possibility anyway of retaining the historic constituency of Halifax; only part of that constituency could remain a dual riding. I certainly do not think we would want any triple ridings; at least I would not have thought it possible in legislation of this kind, which is not dealing with the election law but is dealing with redistribution, to seek to make an amendment of that kind to the election law. I think that would be an altogether bad thing to do.

In the case of Prince Edward Island I have not done the arithmetic—I have no doubt the hon. member has—but I have the impression that Kings county, even with a 25 per cent tolerance, would probably have too small a population to be a constituency. So the historic riding of Queens will not remain the historic riding of Queens if the law is carried out. I have not done the arithmetic, so if the hon. member says I am wrong I will accept that right off, but I think that is the case. Probably Prince county has too large a population for the existing tolerance having regard to what would be the norm for Prince Edward Island.

Since I had been warned about this matter I did have something drafted so that we could look at it, but before we decide whether

we should move an amendment perhaps we should consider rather carefully whether, even if we did seek to do this, we would be carrying out what are the hon. gentleman's real intentions.

There is another consideration that is of some importance. I might say that the method suggested by the gentleman is the only method I would support at all. I would not be prepared to say to the commission that there must be dual ridings. All I would be prepared to say is that if they saw fit they could preserve them in these two cases only. That is the most I would vote for, though I am not saying that I would even want to vote for that.

Mr. Fisher: Is the minister going as far as saying that he would put this in the statute? Is that the suggestion?

Mr. Pickersgill: Well, it could not be done unless there were an amendment to this clause. If we leave the clause as it is now amended in this way, it will not be possible for any commission to establish a dual constituency anywhere. The only way this could be done, as the hon. member for Queens has indicated, is by moving an amendment to provide an exception. Well, it could be done in two ways. It could be made a general power of commissions all across Canada, although I would not be in favour of that at all. I do not think we want to introduce these things where they do not exist. I think the only way which could be justified would be by giving the commissions power to perpetuate as far as they legally could these two particular situations.

I am also a little troubled—and I am trying to be very frank and dispassionate—about delegating a legislative power of this kind to the commissions. It is one thing to tell them to draw the boundaries fairly, but I am wondering whether it would be quite right for parliament to tell these commissions that they might in these two cases, one in Prince Edward Island and one in Nova Scotia, if they saw fit, preserve their dual constituencies in the new boundaries which were drawn, one of which would be the heir, so to speak, of the present constituency of Halifax. It could not be the whole of the present constituency; that would be impossible. The same would be done for Queens.

I have sought, Mr. Chairman, to put the arguments on both sides. I appreciate that I am an import to a part of the country where history and traditions are perhaps cherished more than in other parts of the country.