

Electoral Boundaries Commission

down rules so that the commission will know what it is expected to do, because a commission without rules of that kind would simply be at sea in making any attempt at redistribution.

I would commend to hon. gentlemen a careful reading of the speech to which the Prime Minister referred, made by the Hon. C. G. Power in 1947, where Mr. Power pointed out, with a little more time at his disposal than I have now, some of the difficulties that would be inherent in a commission doing this for the first time. I think once it has been done a first time it will probably be relatively easy in the future because it will be merely a matter of rearranging boundaries to take account of any change in population. But the original redistribution, if it is to be done on a new and scientific basis, is going to be a very formidable task indeed, because we can all give all kinds of examples of what a patchwork quilt there is in every province as a result of taking into account all sorts of special factors.

I might say here that perhaps, having had no personal experience in this matter, I may take a somewhat more objective and a less subjective view than that taken by the Prime Minister. I do not believe there has been much conscious attempt to be unfair in any redistribution I have seen anything of. Sir John A. Macdonald did boast about hiving the Grits in 1882; but certainly in the twentieth century I do not think there has been any wholesale gerrymandering, although I know it is the fashion for oppositions to make that claim and it has been done by both parties as Mr. Drew so fairly pointed out in 1947. But I do not believe that is true at all.

It seems to me that another thing that must be prescribed in addition to the maximum and minimum are what geographical, what historical and what other conditions the commission is to take account of, and what exceptional provisions are to be made. They must not be left to do this thing capriciously or without rules; that is our responsibility here.

Then I say the bill should prescribe that the report of the commission would take the form of a representation bill and that the government would have the duty of presenting that bill, unchanged, to the house. That does not mean that members of the government could not move to amend the measure. It would not be a government measure. The government would not be expected to stand or fall on it at all; if it is an independent commission it would not be fair to the government to ask it to. However, the report should be presented in the form of a representation bill by the commission so that we would

have the benefit of the views of the commission. I think the Prime Minister will find that, in the first redistribution after world war II, when the United Kingdom commission there did make a report, the report was not accepted by the government of the day and very substantial changes were made in the measure which they brought in. That was not in 1949; it was earlier than that. I have not looked up the details but I think it will be found that that was the case.

I do not think that should be allowed to happen. If we are to appoint the kind of commission there ought to be—and I say “we” advisedly because this is not a matter for the government or the opposition but is one for the house as a house to do—and if we are to appoint a commission in which we all would have confidence, their report should be here for us to deal with in the form of a bill. After that bill has been presented if the government then is not satisfied or if the opposition or any hon. member is not satisfied they can move to amend it; but parliament should be sure that it has the views of the commission in that form. I say that is another consideration.

I have very little time this evening, and of course in these days we never know what is to come on the next day, if anything. I shall try therefore to get as much said as I can this evening. The Prime Minister referred to the section of the British North America Act governing redistribution, and the important words there are, “on completion of the census ‘representation’ shall be readjusted”.

Mr. Diefenbaker: I do not wish to break in on the hon. member's speech and I am prepared to recommend that he be granted extra time if the committee will agree. A moment ago the hon. member said we delayed unnecessarily in this matter. Would the hon. gentleman explain how we could have brought this about until the census was completed?

Mr. Pickersgill: That is precisely what I am going to explain to the Prime Minister. I hope the committee will agree to grant me a few extra minutes as the Prime Minister suggested in order that I may complete my remarks this evening.

Since confederation there has been no election ever held without complying with that constitutional provision; no election after a census has been held, except in 1945. In that case, as the Prime Minister will remember, a constitutional amendment was secured from Westminster postponing redistribution until after the war, so that the constitution was complied with.