

Redistribution

it in giving the instructions which were so accurately described by the Minister of Agriculture this afternoon.

If I understand correctly the statement made this morning by the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration—and I take it that it was a statement made on behalf of the government—it is quite clear that the government now takes the attitude that this is not a matter that concerns the government. The suggestion was made that it would be left to the house because redistribution is a matter for the house. All who have a sense of reality as to the precise position in these matters wonder how the subject can now be made one that is not a matter for government policy, particularly in the light of the statement referred to last night which was made by the Prime Minister in the first instance.

With respect, I should like to say to the Prime Minister that, after the debate that has been going on now for several days, a debate in which some very serious questions have been discussed in the house, I think he ought to make a statement to the house. I consider the Prime Minister owes a statement to the house particularly in the light of the reference made last night by the leader of the opposition to the statement made to him by the Prime Minister several months ago at the outset of this matter. I suggest that the statement made by the Prime Minister on that occasion simply cannot be reconciled with the statement made this morning by the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration that this somehow ceases now to be a matter in which the government as such is concerned but becomes a matter for the house.

There is the first point. I think these statements cannot be reconciled. If the statement made this morning by the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration is a statement made on behalf of the government, then it cannot be reconciled with the statement made to the leader of the opposition by the Prime Minister several months ago unless in the meantime there has been a change in the position of the government with relation to the whole question of redistribution.

In the second place I wish to make this observation. How can it be suggested seriously by the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration that this is a subject which ceases to be a matter of concern to the government? How does it suddenly cease to be a matter concerning which the government has a policy? We know perfectly well that several government ministers have already spoken on this subject. We know how attentive government supporters in the house are to what is said by ministers of the government, and surely it is not a very realistic approach to this matter to suggest now that it is a

matter for the house and not one for the government. I am sure that anybody who sits in this house or makes any attempt to follow what happens in the house is not going to be very deeply impressed by the suggestion that the government at this stage ceases to be interested in this matter.

Mr. St. Laurent: Mr. Chairman, the hon. gentleman who has just taken his seat has suggested that I owe a statement to the house. I think I do.

I think that when there is anyone in the house who implies in his speech that the members of the government are not members of the house then there is a statement due to the house to correct that impression. The hon. gentleman is a very good lawyer and the hon. gentleman realizes, as a very good lawyer, that there is a distinction between the executive branch of our constitutional set-up and the legislative branch of our constitutional set-up. It is my opinion, and in spite of anything he has said here I hope to be able to convince him so that it will be his opinion, that it is the legislative branch of our constitutional set-up that has to do with the definition of the constituencies which will send members to parliament; and that that is not one of the functions of the executive branch of our constitutional set-up.

Now, it is as a member of this house that I suggested to the hon. leader of the opposition, as a member of this house, that I felt we both wished this matter to be handled in such a way as would be fair to the Canadian public generally; and that if there came to his attention that there was something going on which he considered unfair, if he brought it to my attention, I would make it my business as a member of this house to see that the objections received consideration. They did get consideration but in the debate that has been going on here I think we must all admit there has been both in words and in implication substantial exaggeration.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. St. Laurent: From the speech of the hon. leader of the opposition last night the inference would be that it is unfair that there should be any change whatsoever to the boundaries of constituencies represented in this house by members of the opposition.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. St. Laurent: That is not the real position of the leader of the opposition but that would be the implication to anyone listening to his speech and to the list of unfair dispositions that were being made. I am sure that is not his position and it is not the