

Redistribution Commission

that it would still further reduce the time likely to be taken in carrying out the redistribution. It also seemed to have another advantage to me; it meant that if we had commissions composed of three persons in each province we would have three people with knowledge of local conditions. These three people would be as independent and as impartial as we could find. They would collectively have three kinds of experience, and three outlooks would be brought to bear on this problem. I thought that would be much better than having only one person from each specific province in the case of the smaller or less populous provinces, and therefore it was decided that in the proposals which would be laid before the house provision would be made for a commission for each of the provinces.

There is at once the problem which will have occurred, I think, to every hon. member—that of making sure that all the commissions would proceed on a relatively uniform basis. It was then that the suggestion was made, one which I believe I made myself, that an office should be created by parliament and an officer of parliament appointed by parliament who would be ex officio a member of each of the 10 commissions and who would have the task of co-ordinating their activities.

Here I come to the point where I feel I should answer the question put to me earlier by the hon. member for Pontiac-Temiscamingue. The question of how this office should be constituted did not seem to present many difficulties. It was quite obvious it would have to be created by parliament and, like the chief electoral officer, the appointment of the commissioner would have to be made by a resolution of parliament.

Mr. Balcer: I am sorry to interrupt the minister, but earlier he raised the point that the chief electoral officer had advised him that if he were to follow a certain system he might not be able to achieve redistribution before 1968. Before the minister proceeds to another subject, I wonder whether he could tell us now what would be the time envisaged by him if this resolution should be approved?

Mr. Pickersgill: I am going to deal with that point. I am very easily confused, as the house knows, and in order to save me that embarrassment I wonder whether hon. gentlemen would let me do it in my own order and in my own time.

Mr. Diefenbaker: You do not want help in that direction.

Mr. Pickersgill: The right hon. gentleman is quite right. I do a sufficiently good job of it myself that I need no help. However, I try not to confuse others. I was saying that it seemed to me whoever would be appointed to

[Mr. Pickersgill.]

the office of representation commissioner should, of course, be appointed in the same way that the chief electoral officer is appointed, by a resolution of the house. It is true, of course, that I have envisaged in my own mind, and I think it is true that my colleagues have the impression, that there is one person who would be better able to fill this office than anybody else we know anything about in Canada, and I do not want to hide for one minute from the house that that person is the present chief electoral officer. I did not conceive that I had any right to offer to that gentleman a position which had not yet been created by parliament, but in my own mind I feel he is a man who, if he would accept the office, would be better qualified to fill it than anyone else I happen to know anything about.

Mr. Martineau: I wonder whether the minister would satisfy the curiosity of the committee and say whether or not he or some other person in authority has approached the chief electoral officer to find out if he would consider accepting this office, if and when it is created by parliament.

Mr. Pickersgill: I think I should be quite frank and say yes, I have reason to believe that the chief electoral officer would accept if he felt that he would be acceptable to all quarters of the house. But, knowing him as we all do, we know he would not wish to accept unless he knew that the appointment would be agreeable to all quarters of the house.

I do not mind saying at once why I feel he would be acceptable. We have had four elections since 1957 in a period of a little over six years. Although some of those elections were quite bitterly fought and many hard things were said, I have not heard in any quarter of the house, no matter who was in office or who was in opposition, any suggestion that they were not conducted with the utmost propriety. I think that all of us as Canadians can be proud of that. I do not want to seem unduly sentimental about this, but as we look about the world today and see with what difficulty other countries change their governments and how impossible it is in so many countries to change them at all without bloodshed and strife, I think that we can be exceedingly proud of what has gone on in this country in these last years. The way in which we have operated the system itself is in my view further evidence of the proposition some of us accept, that our system of parliamentary government is unsurpassed anywhere in the world.

Mr. Knowles: Would the Secretary of State permit a question? If I am anticipating what