

the years ahead. Certainly that is a substantive change, but, in a democracy such as ours, I do not believe that the fairness of regional and provincial representation of the Canadian people in their Parliament should be a secondary consideration to the physical accommodation of members in the House of Commons. Naturally, that point of view is debatable. That is why, in part, we are wrestling with this current bill. The government did not choose to proceed with the work that had already been done and nearly completed prior to the last election in 1984. It decided to begin again and to work out a system whereby the physical size of our House of Commons would not be dramatically changed in the foreseeable future, but a new arrangement of distribution would be made which, in some way, would fairly reflect population growth areas of this country without being unfair to the smaller provinces.

Unfortunately, as Senator Stewart, Senator MacEachen and others have tried valiantly to warn us, this bill does contain mechanisms which will act to the disadvantage of smaller provinces, most particularly Newfoundland and Nova Scotia, in the future. The bill will provide five new seats for Alberta, which is one less than the current formula would have done, and it will provide a similar increase for British Columbia. However, because this new bill did not get under way in the House of Commons until last fall, these additional seats are very much at risk in terms of the next election, when these two provinces may experience the worst of all possible electoral worlds. Should the government choose to call an early election in 1987 or in 1988, which is quite possible, the machinery to carry out such an election under the provisions of this new bill will not be in place. There will be no extra seats for Alberta—not six, not five, but the same old 21, which is highly unfair to the citizens of that province, as well as to the citizens of British Columbia, where the same situation would prevail.

● (1520)

As I said earlier, I fear that this issue is a “sleeper” and the cold reality may not hit in the affected areas until it is too late to protest. Given the scope of the issue in that it touches every area in this country, there really has been very little debate on this bill in this chamber, which did not receive it until just before the Christmas recess.

The government, despite all the best efforts, has not been persuaded to have a second look at the implications of the bill, or to let the formula currently in force carry over pending such reconsideration, so that equity would be assured for the next election. For that reason, honourable senators, I wish to register my own personal concerns today that the passage of this bill may well jeopardize fair treatment in terms of electoral representation for the citizens of my province of Alberta in the next election.

Hon. Douglas D. Everett: Honourable senators, I have not studied the detail of this bill. It is not my intention to enter into the debate on the specifics, but listening to the debate here today it does raise in my mind an issue which I believe is germane to the matter of representation.

Senator MacEachen quite rightly raises the issue that he is concerned that some of the less populous Canadian provinces

[Senator Fairbairn.]

will not enjoy proper representation. On the other hand, Senator MacDonald says that it would be ludicrous to increase the representation of Nova Scotia if, indeed, the population did not increase.

I must say that both arguments appealed to me, because I believe that what we are dealing with is really an inevitability. We may be able to discuss here and in the Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs the possibility of not having representation by population. Historically we may have been able to provide greater representation for the less populated provinces; but the fact of the matter is that over a period of time the House of Commons will be operating under the system of representation by population, and the populated areas will enjoy the greater proportion of representation. This leads to the inescapable conclusion that it is the Senate's function to provide for any discrepancy resulting from lack of that representation from those provinces. It always has been that function since Confederation—

Senator MacEachen: Amen!

Senator Everett:—and it has to be done on that basis. But the fact of the matter is that an appointed Senate cannot do it; and that is why, in essence, we are discussing this problem. Somehow we want to solve it by counteracting any imbalance in representation in the House of Commons. Well, the mechanism to do that exists here. All that we really have to do is institute the processes necessary to bring about an elected Senate.

Some Hon. Senators: Hear, hear.

Senator Everett: The representation problem would then be solved. Senator MacEachen's point of there being too much pressure on individual members of Parliament would also be covered. The smaller provinces, by virtue of the kind of representation that the Senate has, would be represented by the electoral process in the Senate. If we chose a system of proportional representation, such as the single transferable ballot, then not only would we have fair representation of the less populated provinces of Canada, we would also have fair representation of a broader party nature across the country.

It seems to me that the outcome is just inevitable. I do not see why it cannot happen now. At one time I took the attitude that perhaps the Senate could make a declaration that it was going to protect provincial, regional and minority rights, and that for this purpose it would examine every piece of legislation that came before it from the House of Commons. If any piece of legislation offended those basic principles, then the Senate would reject it until the Commons had an opportunity to appeal to the electorate. Then, if they did so—and not in the way they did it in the case of the wiretap bill—and if the electorate gave them the go ahead, they would repass the legislation and the Senate would also pass it.

I thought that was a possibility. But after seeing several examples—of which the wiretap legislation was the most prominent—I realized that that was not going to happen; that if we really wanted to have legitimacy in that regard and if we wanted to do the job that we were put here to do, we had to be