

tion between Ottawa and this far flung country, and the whole question of what we do about election campaigns, how long they are, and so on, are involved in this question of the number of constituents a member would have. So I say that subject to the question of enlarging the House by too many in the 1980's, in the 1990's or in the twenty-first century—some of us would like to stay around to see how it all works out—I think that the formula has a good deal to commend it.

Although it was not my intention to broach this next subject at this time, since it is in my head now I might as well come out with it while we are talking about increased numbers. Some members immediately raise the question as to where we will put them all. So far as the next parliament is concerned after this bill goes through, 280 members will present no problems at all. As you, Mr. Speaker, are aware, we now have 279 desks in the House. We have 138 on the government side and 138 on this side, and also we have three brand new ones in the far corner for Mr. Deputy Speaker and his assistants. So we need only one more desk in the House to accommodate the 280.

Mr. Turner (Ottawa-Carleton): So long as we don't get another Camillien Houde.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): I could share half of my seat with him, and between the two of us we could manage with two full seats, Mr. Speaker.

That picture of using every seat in this chamber of course has to be qualified by the question of how the election results break down and whether it is desirable to have the place fairly evenly balanced. Perhaps another minority parliament would be good for that first House of 280.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mind you, when you go on to 310, another problem is created, but let us worry about that when the time comes.

I have said that the language of this bill is terribly complicated, convoluted and contorted, and the minister's smile suggests that he found it that way too. I still think it should be possible to find someone else to draft these bills rather than lawyers.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Nystrom: Such as Gene Whelan.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): We need someone to put this in language that any person can understand. There seems to be general agreement in some quarters that we should get rid of the lawyers, but there seem to be a few members around with a conflict of interest of that point.

● (1620)

Even so, Mr. Speaker, on examining the language of the bill quite closely I realize that not only is it a bill that sets out the basic principle, namely, that there shall be these three groups and that the large ones get a straight representation, the middle ones get a little better, and that the smaller ones fare a bit better, but then there are such

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things as the provision that no province shall lose any seats at any redistribution, and no province shall have fewer members than some other province that has a lesser population. When I really go through that convoluted language I realize what it does. It provides that there shall be no instance of a province losing seats at any redistribution. That is why Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick will stay where they are even though the reference to their Senate floors has been taken out.

There are some other interesting things. There is a provision in the bill that takes care of the situation, if that day comes, when there are no more small provinces in Canada. Somebody gasped at that, and I gasped too when I saw it. The day when Prince Edward Island has 1,500,000 people is surely far off, but nevertheless I suppose theoretically those who drafted the bill thought the possibility should be considered.

There is also a provision for what happens if a province finds itself protected by two floors. There is the provision that says a province shall not lose any seats at redistribution, and there is another provision that says a province shall not have fewer seats than some other province with lesser population. There may be an instance where a province finds itself protected by both of those floors. In that case the language of the bill makes it clear that the province gets the greater rather than the lesser number of seats.

There is also the provision that no fraction is to count. If one should divide the quotient into a province's population and if it ends up with 14½ seats, that province gets only 14 seats.

The bill has wiped out any reference to the Senate floor. That does not do away with the fact that Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick will continue to have four and ten seats respectively. I welcome that change because it means that I can simplify my bill C-205 which calls for the abolition of the Senate. That bill has not yet got past this House, but one lives in hope. In that bill I have had to consider what would happen to the floor that protects Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick if we did abolish the Senate. I have had to put some of this convoluted language in my bill to provide that they would retain the floor they had when there was a Senate. I can change that now because those provinces are protected by a different floor, the floor that says no province is ever to lose any seats, so the reference to the Senate is gone.

There is no reference in the bill to the "Gardiner rule" or 15 per cent rule. I remember the terrific battle we had over that. It was very obvious that Mr. Gardiner brought the rule in just to save Saskatchewan. He was a minister from Saskatchewan and I suppose was doing his duty by his province, as ministers still feel they have to do in various ways. After a redistribution or two it turned out, however, that it did not save Saskatchewan, but it did save Nova Scotia. It seemed to me a far-fetched rule. I think it is better to have the basic rule that no province loses any seat and the rule that no province is to have fewer seats than any other province with a lesser population. In that sense the new bill is good.

One of the other things I like about this bill if I understand it, and I think I do, is that it has softened the disproportion that existed, let us say, between Prince