

Electoral Boundaries Commission

Mr. Diefenbaker: But the hon. member is given credit for being one of the architects of the 15 per cent.

Mr. Pickersgill: I would say, Mr. Chairman, that any credit I am given in that respect is for something that was achieved, and not merely a promise.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Pickersgill: With regard to the 15 per cent that perhaps kept the hon. gentleman in the House of Commons, I have no objection to taking any credit that the hon. gentleman wishes to give me. But that is not really very germane to the point. In the few minutes I have left to me this evening I will try to deal with the principle that the Prime Minister has put forward.

I may say at once that the principle underlying the proposal is completely acceptable to the official opposition in this house. It is not only acceptable, but a resolution to that effect was formally adopted by the national council of the Liberal party.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Browne (Vancouver-Kingsway): When was that—in 1917?

Mr. Pigeon: You have changed your view.

Mr. Pickersgill: No; I had no view to change. I have explained to—

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Pigeon: Fifteen per cent responsibility last time.

Mr. Pickersgill: I explained to the hon. members that I have had no direct experience of this matter in the past. Here is the position taken by the Liberal party.

The Liberal party believes that redistribution of membership in the House of Commons should be carried out by a non-partisan commission. Until now, this has been done only—

This is so far as Canada is concerned:

—in the province of Manitoba, where the commission was established by a Liberal government.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Pickersgill: If I may continue:

Redistribution means redrawing the boundaries of constituencies according to population. It is required every ten years, after each census. The present government, with characteristic delay, has not arranged for redistribution, based on the 1961 census, in time for the present election. As a result, some parts of the country will be denied the representation in the next parliament to which they are entitled under the constitution of Canada.

A new Liberal government will promptly give effect to the principle of redistribution by a non-partisan commission.

An hon. Member: What happened to the old Liberals?

[Mr. Pickersgill.]

An hon. Member: Is that signed by Mackenzie King?

Mr. Pickersgill: Mr. Chairman, I do not intend this evening to spend any time on the highly selective history and the rather spotty history to which the Prime Minister treated us, nor on the tour around the world that the Prime Minister took, which I have never had the benefit of doing either.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Monteith (Perth): Ask Paul.

Mr. Pickersgill: Mr. Chairman, I think everybody on this side of the chamber listened attentively and quietly to the Prime Minister, and I would hope that in a matter of this sort, when the Prime Minister professes to be seeking to elevate the tone of parliament on this subject, I might be listened to with the same attention that the Prime Minister received.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Starr: It was not elevated when you got up.

Mr. Pickersgill: When the Minister of Labour has finished his interjection, perhaps I could continue. It seems to me that there are certain conditions that will have to be fulfilled in any bill to make it acceptable, I would hope to either side of the house but certainly to us in the official opposition. The commissioners must be appointed by the act; they must be named in the bill. We are certainly not going to agree to take redistribution out of the House of Commons and put it in the hands of the governor in council; I can assure hon. gentlemen of that. We are certainly not going to approve any measure that sets up a commission comparable in any way to the board of broadcast governors. We have had enough of that kind of impartiality in the last few years.

This is not a business for the government. Though the Prime Minister, as the leader of the house, has a certain responsibility to bring the matter before us, in respect of the representation in the house there is no government and there is no opposition; there are simply members of parliament who should, according to the scheme of 1867, represent roughly the same number of constituents, having regard to certain other considerations, some of which the Prime Minister mentioned and all of which certainly have to be taken into account.

It seems to me that the commission cannot be expected to make its own rules. That is our responsibility here in parliament. We will have to specify in the bill the maxima and the minima of population. We will have to lay