

*Electoral Boundaries*

particular, Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Newfoundland were all to lose a seat. This is not the first time that Saskatchewan and Manitoba have lost seats. However, this loss represented a very substantial loss in terms of the numbers they had; it was one out of 13. Clearly these provinces were represented much more poorly, not in terms of the quality of their members because that is not the case—in fact, it is just the opposite—but in comparison with the Senate floor protected provinces of Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick. The electoral boundaries commission for Nova Scotia in particular did away with the constituency of the then president of the privy council, so he was very receptive to the suggestion made by members on this side as well as his own members that the redistribution formula be set aside.

**Mr. Benjamin:** This is a non-partisan debate.

**Mr. Andre:** Yes, certainly. He was receptive to the proposal that the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections be asked to review the whole question of redistribution.

On July 5, 1973 Bill C-208 was brought in to set aside the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act, and the matter was referred to committee. The bill passed committee on July 12 and was given third reading in the House on July 13. I mention those dates because in just two short weeks the whole matter of setting aside redistribution was handled by the House. Seven months later the matter of seeking a new redistribution method was brought to the committee, that is, on February 29, 1974. At that time the then president of the privy council presented some alternatives to the committee, and this took up the total time of the committee on that day. Two months later, on April 9, the committee had a meeting to discuss this redistribution method recommended by the president of the privy council, and that was the only discussion that that method was given. Essentially there has been no opportunity for members of the House to indicate their reaction to the government's recommendation, no opportunity for public debate, no opportunity for the media and for observers of parliamentary processes to react to that method or discuss it.

For that reason it seems to me highly inappropriate for the government at this time to bring in a bill calling for the implementation of a method which has had no analysis or discussion and to ask for the approval of the House. It would be irresponsible for us to grant the government's request. It is especially galling, and I wonder about the priorities of the government.

A week or two ago I received a letter concerning the Abbott Commission, a commission established to look at the question of facilities and space for parliament. It is a commission with representation from both sides of the House, the Senate and outside people. It has staff and an office, it will travel to hear witnesses, and in fact will undertake an extensive study of facilities for parliament. Surely the question of redistribution, of how many members we will have in the House and what the regional representation will be, as well as how well protected will be the small provinces, is at least as important as how many offices and committee rooms we will have.

**Some hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

[Mr. Andre.]

**Mr. Andre:** Surely the responsible thing to do, since we are now no longer in a minority position and have probably four years until the next election, and therefore ample time, to give the consideration, study and analysis which this matter deserves. It is far too important to be dealt with in what can only be described as a haphazard and offhand way. It would be irresponsible to zip this redistribution method through the House to the committee where the government can use its majority to jam it down our throats. I have been on enough committees to recognize that is a very real possibility.

The President of the Privy Council (Mr. Sharp) indicated in his speech that that is not the case. Well, his predecessor in that office told us that the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections would have ample opportunity to discuss this question, but how much opportunity did we have? We had one meeting—two if you count the one at which the government presented its point of view. We had only one and a half or two hours. I do not consider that ample time for discussion.

It has been suggested by the President of the Privy Council and by the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) that this bill may be as good as we can get. That is not true. Anyone with a modicum of imagination can come up with half a dozen alternatives that are superior.

**Some hon. Members:** Let us hear them.

**Mr. Andre:** In order to get these alternatives into a form in which they can be discussed, we will have to be provided with an opportunity, and it has not been provided.

**An hon. Member:** We had a parliamentary committee on the matter in the last parliament.

**Mr. Andre:** Do you know how often it met? It met for two meetings on this subject.

There is much that is wrong with the amalgam method, and I will get to it in some detail. First, I would like to quote from an editorial in the *Calgary Herald* of Saturday, November 30, which states in part:

The bigger House of Commons plan for Canada will not accommodate Alberta's growing sense of urgency about the need to get fair treatment in Parliament . . .

Albertans can be forgiven for not cheering. The bill will not do anything to alleviate a strong feeling that the structure of the House of Commons works against regional aspirations and interests. And, in fact, the bill will have the effect of reducing prospects of redressing the grievances of the West.

Statistics tell the story. Of the 15 new seats planned for the Commons, Alberta stands to gain one; Ontario stands to gain seven. This is fair from a population distribution point of view, but won't reduce fears that the population strongholds of the country will continue using their numerical strength to raid Western resources. Without redistribution, Ontario alone has 88 MPs to represent the users of oil and gas, while Alberta has 19 MPs to represent this province's position as a major energy producer.

● (2040)

By 1983, after a second stage expansion, the four western provinces stand to gain 16 additional seats, while Ontario and Quebec stand to gain 27 additional seats. Boosting the size of the commons beyond the 300 mark will do nothing to improve the decision-making process, and won't help solve the lack of protection for minority interests.