

Supply—Secretary of State

hon. member for Winnipeg South Centre and I suggest that the hon. member for Peel possess his soul in patience.

The point of order raised by the leader of the house is that redistribution in no way affects the estimates of the chief electoral officer. Nothing could be more nonsensical. If there is a redistribution before the next election there is bound to be an entire recasting of this estimate because there would be different borders between the constituencies. Expenditures of all kinds would have to be incurred. This is so obvious that one wonders why it should not be clear to anyone except, perhaps, to someone deliberately seeking to restrict debate. I suggest there is no other opportunity under our rules except that provided by the estimate of the chief electoral officer to discuss this matter which is one which must arrive in the very near future. It is going to affect the estimates now before us, and hon. members should have the right to discuss this question. After all, what is the committee of supply for? It is for the exposure of grievances before money is voted. This government seems to think that no member of the opposition should be allowed to express his views on anything, but that the money should be voted blindly. I suggest that this further attempt to restrict our freedom in committee of supply is ill advised and contrary to the rules.

Mr. Dorion: I should like to recall to the hon. member, first of all, that question of redistribution is provided for by clause 51 of the constitutional act.

Mr. Fisher: And the Representation Act.

Mr. Dorion: Yes, but the basis is clause 51 of the act I have mentioned. If hon. members would look at that clause they would see that redistribution is based on the result of the census. The responsibility for the census is that of my colleague the Minister of Trade and Commerce. The Secretary of State has nothing to do with that. The Secretary of State is only the channel of communication between the House of Commons and the chief electoral officer. My responsibility is only to ask, for that officer, the moneys needed for the accomplishment of this work.

Moreover, if hon. members would look at these estimates they would see that there is nothing provided in them for the expenses of elections, properly speaking. Those expenses are paid from the consolidated fund. I believe, therefore, that it is improper to discuss this point, it being one upon which I personally, or as minister, have no competence to speak.

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Mr. Fisher: Might I just add this, Mr. Chairman? This is the only estimate of which I am aware, among all the estimates which the government has put forward, which relates to the electoral officer. His job is to prepare for elections, to be in charge of the whole framework of machinery. I do not know any single thing which relates more to the machinery than does redistribution. I have on the order paper a bill relating to redistribution.

Mr. Churchill: That was your opportunity, then.

Mr. Fisher: No. It is a very simple bill seeking a change in the British North America Act. I was not going to deal at all with that point. Perhaps if I could set out for you, Mr. Chairman, what I had intended to deal with, it might be helpful. I had in mind the changes which were impending and I had thought to make some suggestions which in my opinion we should be considering at the present time in order to handle the redistribution. For example, it appears at the present time as if Nova Scotia is going to lose a seat, and Saskatchewan three seats. We have discrepancies between the rural areas and the industrial areas, between the country and the city, and so on. If this does not relate to elections, I do not know what does.

Mr. Churchill: On a point of order, the hon. member for Port Arthur has clearly set out what his intentions are. The hon. member for Port Arthur has very clearly stated that it is his intention to have a full debate in respect of redistribution. He has already suggested that it is his idea that certain provinces will lose seats while other provinces will gain seats. That is the type of subject he wishes to discuss, and I suggest such a debate could range for days. The hon. member will have the opportunity of debating this subject during the consideration of his own bill, which is presently on the order paper, as well as opportunity of discussing the subject during a supply motion, or when a committee of this parliament is set up to consider redistribution.

I was present in this house some years ago when a committee was set up to consider redistribution, at which time opportunity was provided for a complete and thorough debate of every facet of redistribution. To attempt to discuss this subject at a time when the committee is dealing with the expenses of the chief electoral officer and his officials, in a discussion regarding the duties of that branch, I suggest is completely out of order.

Mr. Caron: Mr. Chairman, I should like to say a word or two regarding this point of order.