

Electoral Boundaries Commissions

The thing which bothers me is that throughout this whole debate on redistribution which, with intervals, has stretched for many months, we never heard anything about this problem of dual constituencies. I happen to represent the twin cities of Port Arthur and Fort William and I am sure if there are arguments—aside from historical ones—for dual representation they are even better for Port Arthur and Fort William than they are for these two constituencies down east, because there is almost an equal balance in the size of my constituency.

If we are having a really clean slate to start with, then we should never have had this amendment. I am not going to raise any objections to the bill as it stands, but I would like a fuller explanation from the minister than this sort of tortuous path he walked on Friday between his own feelings and the feelings of other people.

Having said this critically I think I should go on to compliment the minister. I think we should thank somebody that he managed to get back here from his bed of pain, because this is the first measure of any scope which we have got through this place for a long time; and despite criticisms I and others may make I think he deserves some recognition for the fact that he got it this far. But surely it was not just to get it this far that he made that rather equivocal speech on dual constituencies?

Hon. J. W. Pickersgill (Minister of Transport): I think there is only one point involved here, and if the hon. gentleman had read my earlier observations he would have seen that it was explained. The historic constituency of Halifax is in fact Halifax county, which has far too big a population to be merely two seats. If I understand correctly what we did on Friday, and I think I do, if the commission so desires it will be possible to make a dual seat constituency out of part of Halifax county, the greater part population-wise, but this will not preserve the historic riding of Halifax, which was the whole county, because of the rule that the population cannot exceed a certain figure.

I know both hon. members for Queens who proposed this matter understood that perfectly, and I think the same would be true in P.E.I. where, because of the 25 per cent rule, it would not be possible to have Queens county retained as Queens county, or where it would be very difficult to do so. However, that does not mean that the greater part of Queens county could not be a dual constit-

[Mr. Fisher.]

ucency. Therefore this has some meaning, but I think I am right in saying this would not preserve the historic ridings we have known because the commission will have to carry out the mandatory part with regard to limits of population.

Mr. F. J. Bigg (Athabasca): Mr. Speaker, I have three points to raise on third reading. The whole purpose of this bill is to provide more realistic boundaries for our constituencies, and I would like to bring to the attention of the house that in my own district of Athabasca it is at present necessary for the hon. member for Jasper-Edson to travel 100 miles through my territory on the only road available to get to the northeast corner of his own district. This is a waste of his time, and it is a waste of public money when he tries to cover isolated communities up near my headquarters.

This brings me to my second point. I am afraid that these commissions, when they are set up, will be operating in the dark. In every constituency there is a man who for possibly ten or 12 years has had a close relationship with everything that goes on in that constituency. He knows its problems, and it would be a tremendous waste of his experience if the commissions could not consult him.

I am referring, Mr. Speaker, to the sitting member. I do not say sitting members should be appointed to the commissions. In any case, this would probably require an amendment to the bill itself. But I think it should be placed on record now, for the guidance of the commissions, that use should be made of the services of the sitting member, or possibly of those who have sat in this house over the past ten or 15 years. The commission should ask them what they think should be done in connection with the redrawing of the maps, for the welfare of the country as a whole.

Cynics may say this would amount to political interference but I think most if not all members of the house are public spirited in these matters, and surely it would be a waste of experience if they were not consulted.

There is another matter I wish to raise, and I ask permission of the house to bring it up at this time because it is difficult to discuss it in connection with any other piece of legislation I know of. A great many of our constituencies are far too large to allow any member to get around them adequately in the absence of some further assistance from the government. As the most important example