

Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Suspension

New Westminster (Mr. Leggatt) said, the political water feels cold to the people who formerly supported this act.

Having listened to the debate on this bill for several days, I am surprised that the act has never been criticized; only the bill has been criticized, as well as the performance of the commissioners. Nobody has said that there is anything wrong with the act, which leads me to believe that no matter whether we take 10 months, 12 months, 17 or 18 months in reviewing it, we will not come up with anything much better. I have yet to hear any member that this or that is wrong with the act. Instead, hon. members have been saying, "There are 200,000 people in my constituency whereas there are only 45,000 in another fellow's". The faults they point to are the faults of independent commissions. If there were something seriously wrong with the act, of course we could amend it and bring in a better act. That is not the case. I predict, if this bill is passed, that 18 months from now we shall either find ourselves operating again under the act of 1964 or face another bill that will again postpone the operation of this act.

I was surprised that the hon. member for Davenport (Mr. Caccia) should raise, on a personal note, the fact that hon. members who were questioning the bill had not been at the committee hearings on a particular day. I know the hon. member for Davenport attends that committee faithfully. However, hon. members have heavy duties and must attend other committees. The hon. member for Peel South was attending the economic affairs committee that day. I was at the committee, and I am not certain that the hon. member for Davenport and I were attending the same committee.

• (1710)

The hon. member for Davenport (Mr. Caccia) implied that Mr. Castonguay was in favour of this procedure. I did not get that impression. At the committee hearing he talked about how long the 1964 bill took. He said:

If you recall, that bill was introduced in 1963, it got first reading in December 1963, and it was not passed until November 1964. That has become the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act. You are opening up the same can of worms now.

I was amazed how much Mr. Castonguay was against that. He went on to say, and I quote:

Yes; you are opening up the same can of worms now. I am in no position to know whether you parliamentarians can find a final solution to this but I wish you lots of luck. On this particular score we will leave it there.

Later in the day he had several things to say along the same line. He pointed out the difficulty of getting commissioners. He stated that certain commissioners were selected by the Speaker of the House of Commons. He said the difficulty was to get new commissioners within 18 months. These people do not want to sit around for 18 months without anything to do. They have a trained staff. Are they also to sit around for 18 months at the expense of the taxpayer? Most of these commissioners want to be let go; they do not want to be a drain on the taxpayers for the next 18 months. Some suggested they go to the food prices review committee which also does not have anything to do.

[Mr. McKinnon.]

Mr. Castonguay said, and I quote:

Now next time around I wonder how many Chief Justices are going to get these chaps to agree to do it again. I do not know. This is the first time it has happened that in one province the chief justice of that province was not able to convince any of the judges of his court or other courts to accept this job. . . .

So I am going to go to Joe Blow, the Speaker is going to go to somebody and say, "Would you fill a job as a commissioner of the Electoral Boundaries Commission for Manitoba?"

With all respect to the hon. member for Davenport, I would say that Mr. Castonguay was not in favour of the action contemplated in this bill. I got the distinct impression he was furious about it.

The hon. member for Comox-Alberni (Mr. Barnett) raised a very interesting point in committee. Nothing has been adduced to show that the commissioners and the commission have to stop work and the redistribution act stopped. He pointed out that if we postpone this act for 18 months, we would be ready to have an election in 1976 under a new act. An election in 1976 would be on the 1961 boundaries. Fifteen years ago our cities did not look like they look now. Whole new cities have been built in that time. There are new constituencies in what was formerly vacant land. It would be totally unacceptable for British Columbia to have an election with the 1961 boundaries.

We in British Columbia have been waiting patiently for this act for many years. The hon. member for Gander-Twilligate (Mr. Lundrigan) talked about the alienation of voters in Newfoundland and other far reaches of the country. British Columbia cannot be ignored in this regard. We have 23 seats but are entitled to 26. That represents a gain of 14 per cent. We are being robbed of 14 per cent. Vancouver and the Fraser Valley are the main areas of concern. My constituency of Victoria has 62,000 voters. This is large because of the particular age group for which Victoria is noted. We have far more adults in relation to other cities. South Vancouver, Burnaby and the start of the Fraser Valley are entitled to additional seats. They are now being deprived of their entitlement.

The reason for postponing the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act is to produce another plan. Does anyone have any idea what this new plan will be? If the members of this House are as provincially minded as they are at the present time, there will be 10 plans. Each plan will ensure that that province does not lose anything. It is like Alice in Wonderland where the Red Queen said that everyone who runs will receive a prize. I understand the Liberal party accepted that philosophy for the 1972 election. Whether they ran or not, everyone received a prize. That should not apply to this act unless we want to have an enormous House. Every province can't win; some must lose. As I said the other day, if British Columbia had the equivalent of Prince Edward Island on a per capita basis, we would have 78 members. If the House had the equivalent number of members, there would be 760 members.

When we talk about adding two or three or 20 or 30 members, we are not being realistic with regard to rep by pop. Rep by pop almost seems to have become a dirty word in this House. I remind hon. members that rep by pop is one of the things that almost destroyed this country before confederation. Confederation came about as an answer to that problem. But representation by population does not have to be adhered to slavishly.