

Comments Presented to the Electoral Boundaries Commission of Prince Edward Island by the Société Saint-Thomas-d'Aquin - Ms. Marie Bernard - September 13, 2004

The Société Saint-Thomas-d'Aquin (SSTA) is the voice of the Acadian and Francophone community of Prince Edward Island. Created in 1919, this Acadian society has a membership of some 1,200 Islanders. From its head office in Summerside, the SSTA oversees a wide range of issues in the political, socioeconomic and cultural sectors.

Mission

To work so that each Acadian and Francophone Islander can live and achieve their full potential both individually and collectively in French.

Objectives of the SSTA

- To regroup the Island Acadian and Francophone community;
- To represent its members in national, provincial and municipal government issues, especially in matters pertaining to minority rights;
- To develop programs and services that will enhance the development of the Acadian and Francophone community in all sectors;
- To encourage harmonious relations among all Acadian and Francophone Islanders as well as with Acadians and Francophones of other provinces and countries;
- To establish and administer a funding program to provide financial assistance to Acadian and Francophone students of Prince Edward Island.

Our Findings After Reading the Interim Report

As we had indicated in our first report, the Supreme Court of Prince Edward Island has decided that a deviation can be justified on the basis of a linguistic minority claim to representation, and that the Acadian population represented by the Evangeline-Miscouche District is entitled to a special status.¹ We had strongly suggested that no changes be brought to District 24.

After having read your interim report, we are extremely concerned with the new boundary you are suggesting. In fact, adding the Lot 16, Grand River, Arlington and Linkletter areas would expand the existing Evangeline-Miscouche District considerably. We see an enormous contradiction in what you are bringing forward. We are questioning how you expect to accomplish your objective of increasing the number of electors in the district while preserving and fostering the Acadian and Francophone language and identity. In your report, it is mentioned that "The boundaries of the proposed electoral district of Evangeline will see this tradition continue with the great majority (75%) of the electors being Acadian and/or Francophone". We have serious concerns in regards to the origin of this figure. Based on the

¹ Prince Edward Island Commissioner of Electoral Reform. 2003 Prince Edward Island Electoral Reform Commission Report, December 2003, p. 76.

Census 2001 figures, we find it hard to understand how the number of Acadians and Francophones can be maintained at 75% if we add the Lot 16, Grand River, Arlington and Linkletter areas to the electoral district. In fact, at the present time, the proportion of English-speaking voters is 57.7% versus 42.3% of French-speaking voters, and in the new district you are proposing, the proportion of English-speaking voters will increase to 64.2% versus 35.8% of French-speaking voters (see data from the 2001 Census in appendix). Furthermore, the above-mentioned areas do not necessarily have any close links with the French services that are offered in the Evangeline area, specifically Wellington, Abram-Village and Mont-Carmel. With reference to the Carter case, we wish to remind you that during the delimitation of electoral boundaries, we must ensure that the population has a right to effective representation. We must remember, however, that effective representation often cannot be achieved without taking into account countervailing factors. You are responsible for ensuring minority representation; in our case, Francophones represent the minority. You are suggesting to reduce the variance from -17.20% to -1.08%, however we believe this to be unnecessary.

It is thus very clear to us that by expanding the area, you are diluting the number of Acadian and Francophone votes in a flood of Anglophone votes. By adopting the proposed change, you are putting a minority-language community at an unfair disadvantage; this community will lose its political impact and thus not have much of a chance of electing a Francophone voice to represent its people.

Finally, we believe you must ensure that the delimitation of the electoral map guarantees that the Legislative Assembly will effectively represent the diversity of the Island's social mosaic. Unfortunately, the proposed changes (..missing..) Francophone minority rights. That is why we are suggesting that you seriously study the impacts that will be brought about if you add the boundaries north of Route 2.

We wish to thank the Electoral Boundaries Commission of Prince Edward Island for letting us present our comments. We truly hope you will give them ample consideration.