

ELECTORAL DISTRICTS BILL SELECT COMMITTEE 15 January 1923

Edith Cowan voiced her opinion on a number of representational matters including reducing the membership of Parliament and the problem of malapportionment. She supported proportional representation.

Mrs COWAN: (West Perth) [3.33]: I have not spoken on the Bill previously, because, after listening to the long and somewhat wearisome debate, I decided it was better not to still further weary hon. members with an additional speech. But when I heard the member for Sussex (Mr. Pickering) say that there had been a party meeting and that certain arrangements had been made, I wished to dissociate myself with those proceedings.

Hon. W.C. Angwin: You were ill at the time; that is why you were not there.

Mrs COWAN: I have not been to any party meeting to discuss this measure. I have not spoken to any member of the Government on the question nor have I been subjected to any influence on the matter. I mentioned to some hon. members that I intended to support the suggestion that an extra member should be given to the metropolitan area. In my opinion the metropolitan area is under-represented if we go by the quota. I was elected as being in favour of a reduction of the number of members of both Houses, although I do not know that it would be advisable altogether to begin with this Chamber only at the present time. There is no suggestion of reduction in the Bill and really no increase. As a matter of fact, on a population basis, the metropolitan area is entitled to 24 members. It will, therefore, be appreciated that in getting two extra members we are not getting anything like our fair quota. I object to the statements that have been made that I as a member on the Government side of the House have been influenced and dictated to as to what attitude I shall adopt. I resent the suggestion that I have been told that I cannot act along the lines I consider right. If anyone will move for reduction in the number of members I will give them my support. If the member for North Perth (Mr. MacCullum Smith) moves in that direction I have told him I will support him, but I am afraid that I will be the only other supporter he will get. In those circumstances, therefore, it is a waste of time to pursue such a course, and we have wasted too much already.

Mr Speaker: I do not think I can allow a general discussion on these matters.

Mrs COWAN: The member for Sussex was allowed to speak about proportional representation. Am I not allowed to do so?

Mr Speaker: He was pointing out what it would mean in order to get the information necessary if a select committee were appointed.

Mrs COWAN: Any proposal for proportional representation will have my support. I do not think that we should have a select committee appointed at the present juncture, for in my opinion, it would be a waste of time. If we have much more of our time wasted I shall feel inclined to get up and say, as was said by an influential public man many years ago, "For goodness sake, gentlemen, cease wasting time like this; let us get on with the work of the country."

Hon W.C. Angwin: That would suit the Ministry very well.

The Minister for Mines: Hear, hear!