

Supply

too blatant, you can be sure that taxpayers back home call their member in Ottawa to pressure him or her into reconsidering his views.

Yet nobody will judge the actions of the senators in the Upper House. These individuals are there, appointed by the government in a partisan way and often for services rendered. They stay there until their retirement at 75. We then must pay them a pension on top of having to pay the full salary of their successors.

You will understand that I cannot consider such a treatment to be in accordance with the principle of democracy. You will therefore better understand my opposition to the payment of \$26.9 million for program expenses to an institution that is in no way representative of Canadians and Quebecers.

The five provinces that once had an Upper House abolished that political institution. That was the case in 1968 in Quebec, which was the last province to abolish the Senate because it no longer served a need that once existed. The same question arises for the Canadian Senate.

Can we consider abolishing the Senate? For almost 30 years, the question of the further existence of the Senate has constantly been raised. The Supreme Court gave a break to the Senate when ruling in 1980 that Parliament could not abolish the Senate without having a law passed by the British Parliament.

• (1720)

Yet, at patriation time in 1982, the main aspects regarding the powers of the Senate, its regional and provincial make-up and its non-elected nature were enshrined in the new Constitution, which opened a door for the government.

Rather than taking steps and solving once and for all the Senate issue, the government preferred to focus on Senate reform, with the results that we now have. How can senators justify being allocated \$54 million a year when the Senate does not sit for long periods of time, when recess periods are numerous and long and when absenteeism is very high even when the Senate is sitting?

Do people know that 450 employees had to be hired to work for the 104 senators. This is an average of 4.3 employees for each senator? Do people know that \$54 million represents a yearly average of \$520,000 for each senator? We could create a lot of jobs with \$54 million.

Mr. Speaker, in conclusion, I wonder why we have to add to the burden of the taxpaying population of Canada and Quebec an extra \$26 million to maintain a non-democratic institution that

does not represent at all the regions and has not been given any mandate by the people.

Mrs. Anna Terrana (Vancouver East): Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to the passionate speech of the hon. member. Much has been said about the Senate already.

During the election campaign, many people asked me to do something about the Senate. I believe we all have the same problem, we want to improve the Senate. My question is about the Senate. Most civilized countries have a Senate, but I heard the opposition party's members say that they want it abolished.

What kind of checks and balances do they think we should have for the House of Commons? Do they think we have to abolish the Senate to improve the system, or would they consider an improved Senate which would work the way it should?

Mr. Laurin: Mr. Speaker, I would like to repeat to the hon. member that the provinces which did away with their upper houses never regretted it. The province of Quebec, where the Legislative Council was abolished in 1968, never regretted that decision, and the laws are not worse than they were.

The people of Quebec barely noticed the disappearance of the Legislative Council. If it had not been for the headlines in the dailies, a good part of the population might never have known that the Legislative Council had ceased to exist.

I repeat, the modern means of communication are the watchdog of the people. When the Prime Minister of the former government announced his intention to pass legislation to limit old age pensions, a little lady, very shy, very modest, rose up in front of television cameras and said to the Prime Minister: "Charlie Brown, you broke your promises".

It did not take long, it did not take a Senate to make the Prime Minister realize that he was about to do something that the people did not approve. It took only a single and modest taxpayer to tell the Prime Minister, in front of the cameras, that the bill he was about to pass was unjust for a good many people.

It did not take a Senate, the Prime Minister backed down and the bill was never voted on.

• (1725)

I challenge the present government to try to pass, tomorrow, a bill which would be against the best interest of the people, and then try to enforce it despite the opposition of the population. The Senate would be of no help in such a case.

Senators themselves had to be called to order a few months ago when they asked for a pay raise. It is not the House of Commons that made the senators reconsider their position, it was public opinion. Senators were told that they had not shown enough wisdom to realize that in a recession everybody had to