

The Senate

On March 10 of this year, the Alberta Legislature unanimously confirmed its support for the special committee's report.

Others have suggested looking at the Australian Senate as a means of grafting the federal principle on to a parliamentary system of government. Like the Canadian Senate, the Australian Second Chamber was intended to ensure that state interests would be taken into account with the national Government.

Senate reform and a directly elected Senate, in particular, are issues which have acquired considerable public appeal and hold great attraction to a number of political leaders in the west. There is little doubt that direct election represents, in part, a desire for a stronger voice in federal institutions. Similarly, there is some sympathy for the Triple-E proposal, though difficult questions remain about the powers of such a Senate, its relationship to the House of Commons, and its effect on the powers of provincial Governments. As noted by Professors Peter McCormick and David Elton in their March 1987 article for the Canada West Foundation entitled *The Western Economy and Canadian Unity*, the replacement of an existing Senate with a new elected Senate will raise a wide range of questions of detail which will have to be worked out. Nevertheless, they added:

If Canada is to maintain and enhance the opportunities for its citizens in an increasingly competitive world, it must create national institutions which are capable of acting in the interests of all Canadians.

Finally, Professors McCormick and Elton impressed upon the First Ministers the need for attention to Senate reform. They said:

We have only begun the process of the renewal of the Canadian federation, and if the impetus is lost now we may not have the luxury of waiting another century before the problems arise again.

Prior to the First Ministers' meeting at Meech Lake, Premier Getty endorsed the Triple E proposal. In his April 5 speech to the Alberta Progressive Conservative Party Convention, he declared that Canada "can only grow in a healthy way if our regional representation is fair and balanced".

While not in any way downplaying the importance of Senate reform, on April 9 in the House the Prime Minister reminded all First Ministers of their commitment under the August 1986 Edmonton Declaration that the top constitutional priority was the following one:

—to bring about Quebec's full and active participation in the Canadian federation. There was a consensus among the Premiers that then they will pursue further constitutional discussions on matters raised, which will include, amongst other items, Senate reform, fisheries, property rights, etc.

The Prime Minister went on to say:

If the matter of Senate reform is reached pursuant to this formula enunciated by the Premiers, the Government of Canada will have a proposal to put forward in regard to Senate reform.

In this same spirit the Secretary of State for External Affairs (Mr. Clark) injected an element of caution as we enter the second round of constitutional discussions. Speaking in Camrose, Alberta on April 25, he pointed out that many questions "have to be considered very carefully as we proceed with Senate reform because you cannot change one institution in isolation from the rest". The Minister also affirmed that "we want changes that make Canada work better, that require

both commitment and care". He added that this was the approach in which the Government would address the undeniable need for Senate reform.

The Prime Minister and the 10 Premiers took a crucial step in strengthening the federation by reaching an agreement on the top constitutional priority—bringing Quebec into the Constitution. However, the process does not end there. The communiqué issued at Meech Lake on April 30 required the following:

A First Ministers' Conference on the Constitution be held not less than once per year and that the first be held within 12 months of proclamation of this amendment but not later than the end of 1988.

Among the items on the agenda to be entrenched in the Constitution will be Senate reform, including the functions and role of the Senate, the powers of the Senate, the method of selection of Senators, and the distribution of Senate seats.

Finally, as a demonstration of good faith on the part of the Prime Minister, the communiqué provided:

—until constitutional amendments regarding the Senate are accomplished the federal Government shall appoint persons from lists of candidates provided by provinces where vacancies occur and who are acceptable to the federal Government.

I remind Hon. Members that this change to the method of Senate appointments is a variation of numerous proposals in the past aimed at providing a role for the provinces in the selection of Senators. Among these was one put forward by the federal Government in the 1969 discussion paper entitled *The Constitution and the People of Canada*. The paper suggested:

The Senate could be partly selected by the federal Government and partly selected by provincial Governments. The method of selection of Senators by the provinces could be by nomination of the provincial Governments.

The Prime Minister announced the following in the House on May 1:

The Meech Lake Agreement is good for Canada and good for Canadians. It will unblock the constitutional reform process and enable Canadians to turn their attention to other issues such as Senate reform and fisheries.

The tabling and proclamation of the Meech Lake Agreement will conclude the first round of constitutional renewal. Senate reform is very much a part and indeed is at the top of the agenda of the second round.

Though much remains to be done, let us not forget that much has been accomplished. I believe, as the Prime Minister declared in his address at Sept Îles, Quebec on August 6, 1984, that we are on the threshold of a true national renewal.

[Translation]

Mr. Gabriel Fontaine (Lévis): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased today to debate the motion sponsored by our colleague from Bow River (Mr. Taylor) concerning the reorganization of the Senate. Perhaps it might be useful if I were to put this question in a certain historical context to make it easier to understand. First I would refer to the Charlottetown meeting of the Fathers of Confederation when these outstanding Canadians set up a parliamentary system designed to protect the interests of every region of Canada, and this was the advent of the House of Commons. They also established a Senate, and one of its objectives was to protect the interests of the various components of Canada, especially its minorities.