

Supply

Prime Minister to play a partisan role, red or blue, or to represent pressure groups. What they do is lobby.

Here is the truth: Over the last 50 years, the Senate used its veto power only to delay, as was pointed out by my friend, the hon. member for Vancouver Quadra. Between 1943 and 1964, only two bills were rejected by the Senate and since 1964, only one, and under circumstances which were not really significant, considering that on the rejected bill, C-43 about abortion, MPs and senators were free to vote according to their conscience. Before the Constitution Act of 1982, the Senate always bowed to the desires of the government and the Commons. It did not exercise its veto power because it was continuously controlled by the party in power.

When the Canadian Senate was created, the idea was to enable the senators to distance themselves from the partisan positions taken by the members of the House of Commons. The idea was to have a House of sober second thought which would be above the bursts of passion of the people.

• (1620)

In Canada, the Fathers of Confederation were in favour of nominating senators to preserve the independence of the members of the Upper House. One could have expected that senators, who hold office until they turn 75—quite the job security at a time when unemployment rate is so high, both in Canada and Quebec—and are not subject to the whims of the people, would have shown their independence towards the party in office.

On the contrary, the Upper House members have been staunchly partisan, with little regard for their role as impartial law-makers. It needs to be stated again, senators are appointed on a strictly partisan basis.

For the Bloc Quebecois, which is concerned not only with Quebec's interests, but also with the democratic values dear to all Canadians, the contradiction between the myth of a House of sober second thought and the reality of a partisan Canadian Senate, is reason enough to oppose any kind of subsidy for this useless institution and to advocate its abolition.

Some hon. members: What a waste!

Mr. Leroux (Richmond—Wolfe): The principle of equal regional representation has become increasingly more tenuous as the regions have evolved, as the member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell mentioned in his question. I submit that the original regional distribution, which dates back to the negotiations surrounding the 1867 Constitution Act, is no longer representative of today's population nor of present regional borders. Fortunately, provincial assemblies quickly took over the Senate's role regarding representation of regional interests.

Finally, we must mention the dismal failure of the Canadian Senate as the protector of minorities. One of the Upper House's important roles, which is enshrined in this country's Constitution, is not only provincial or regional representation, but also the representation and protection of interests less well protected by the House of Commons.

Since linguistic duality, the notion of two founding nations, is a fundamental characteristic of Canada, such duality should normally be manifested in the Senate and be a fundamental element of its make-up. I am referring here to the double-majority mechanism, which ensures a more adequate protection for French-speaking minorities outside Quebec.

But, never ever has the Upper House stood up for these minorities' interests, and this is a proven fact. Take, for example, the problems encountered by all French-speaking communities in Canada, and that was evidenced again today. The Senate's action in all its spheres of activity fails miserably.

In fact, Canada's Upper House has a very clearly defined mandate, which is to represent partisan interests, Tories or Grits. A majority of the senators appointed by the Prime Minister have some political experience, in fact approximately half of them, and the others usually have rendered well-recognized services to the party in power. The Senate does allow a golden retirement for politicians and others who are long-time supporters of Liberal and Conservative members and who have always been close to the corridors of power in Canada.

From 1925 to 1963, the average age of senators was 69. In 1975, it was 64 years. A seat in the Senate is a true reward at career's end, since one does not have to fight anymore to keep one's seat until the age of 75. For the government, it is both a reward and a way to control its institution.

Mr. Don Boudria (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell): Mr. Speaker, I agree with some of the hon. member's comments but certainly not with all of them. First, the hon. member claims to be the champion of regions in Canada. He said a few moments ago that his party and himself are protecting the interests—these are his exact words—the interests of Quebec and those of the other provinces.

• (1625)

Should he be reminded that the premier of Alberta, for example, wants the Senate not only to be maintained but to be even more powerful? How can the hon. member suggest abolishing an institution which some premiers want not only to keep but to strengthen?

Second, as for the French-speaking senators from outside Quebec, well, the hon. member does not seem to be very well informed. At this very moment, Senator Eymard Corbin is on the official languages committee, defending the interests of francophones outside Quebec. It is not the first time that Senator Corbin has defended the interests of French-speaking minori-