

Senate Reform

upper House which would reflect the diverse regional interests in this grand country we call Canada.

Confederation was a deal between separate and independent colonies. They came together to form this country and we have done well. But from time to time pressures build and there is a need to restructure the deal. This report by practical working politicians is a basis for a new deal to be struck. I therefore urge my colleagues to take a serious and considered look at the report.

On an over-all basis the committee found that the status quo was simply not satisfactory. Again and again individual Canadians and groups came before the committee and said the status quo is not acceptable. They want change. The majority wanted change in the direction of an elected Senate. The proposal we made would clearly indicate that the Cabinet would have to be more sensitive. If the recommendations of the Special Joint Committee were the law of the land today, we would never have faced the National Energy Program. We would never have faced that first constitutional program. The Cabinet would have to have been much more sensitive to the regions and the interest of our diverse peoples.

As well, Mr. Speaker, the committee found that the role of the Senate would clearly be to represent the regional nature of Canada. We accepted the fact that the lower House would always be weighted in favour of the two central provinces on the basis of representation by population. That was important because we have to represent the majority of the people and the reality is that some 15 million people in this country reside in Ontario and Quebec. The principle of representation by population is one that our ancestors fought and died for and we did not think we should switch from that. But as a counterbalance the upper House could quite legitimately be weighted in favour of the regions and therefore be a proper check and balance to the unreasonable use of the concentrated power of the central provinces in this, the lower House, the House of Commons. That is why we recommended the Senate be elected and that it be a check on the lower House.

Another thing which came through loud and clear during the committee hearings was that Canadians want Parliament to be an important dimension to their lives. People have no trouble at all in wearing two hats in this country. They are proud to wear their Quebec hat or their Alberta hat but they also want to have a Canadian hat. They want to be proud of that Canadian hat. However, under the way Parliament exists now, people in the regions particularly have trouble with their Canadian hat because they do not believe their legitimate interests are represented.

For example, in the west we found, as a result of the National Energy Program and that first constitutional proposal, a real and deep sense of alienation. However, had we had the Senate that we propose, that would not have happened. When we talked to the people of Quebec we found they wanted to be proud to be Canadian, yet they felt that the power of this lower House, which from their perspective is so much weighted to the anglophone population, was such that they did not see it as offering adequate protection to them.

Under our proposal they would have that protection. Therefore, everyone can have a Canadian hat and be proud of it.

In my own mind I believe that is the most important reason why we have to change the Senate. Certainly the Progressive Conservative Party, now that it is in power, has Members and Cabinet Ministers from every province and there may be a lessening of the tensions right now. But we want to form a Senate for the long-term good of the nation. To do so we need to have a Senate with the attributes that we recommended for it.

That brings me to the actual recommendations of the Special Joint Committee. As I said earlier, we first of all agreed that the Senate would have to be elected. Indeed, the first sentence of the report reads:

We have concluded that the Senate should be elected directly by the people of Canada.

That sentence is the result of the hard work done by the former Member for Perth, Mr. Bill Jarvis, who worked long and hard on this committee. Indeed, while he was a Member of this House he worked long and hard for the sake of all of Canada.

● (1610)

As I say, the first sentence in the report says that the Senate must be elected. That was, without a shadow of a doubt, the feeling of Canadians. An appointed Senate today simply lacks the political legitimacy to exercise any authority. In order to have that authority it must be elected. We found that it should come from single member constituencies so that it would be accountable. There is a school of thought in the country that the Senators should come from the multi-member constituencies and that the constituency should be a whole province. The committee found that that would mean that the larger centres in the provinces would elect all of the Senators and the outlying regions would not have representation.

For example, if all of the 12 Senators from the Province of Alberta were elected, they would all come from Edmonton and Calgary. In Ontario they would come from Toronto. Therefore, we recommended that they come from single member constituencies so that the rural, outlying areas in Ontario, Quebec, Alberta and the other provinces would have Senators in the House and their views would be represented. It really is a transfer of power to the people as compared to a provincial Cabinet.

There is also a school of thought that the provincial Cabinet should be able to appoint the Senators to this federal House. Our committee found that that would not be acceptable because, if there is going to be a transfer of power, it should be to the people who should have the power to remove Senators rather than the provincial Cabinet.

The other dimension vis-à-vis provincial appointment, Mr. Speaker, is that if the provincial Cabinets appoint the Senators to Parliament that would, in effect, give them complete sovereignty over the Section 92 powers and half of the Section 91 parliamentary powers. In effect, two-thirds of the power in the nation would be controlled directly by the provincial Houses.