

*The Senate*

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, nothing stands in the way of the tyranny of the majority. If our colleagues on Government benches want to change the structure and powers of the Senate, we agree with them that it might be a good initiative. We would like to have more details. The suggestions made by my colleague fall somewhat short, but it might be a starting point. In any event, I hope she will not spend weeks and months talking about Senate reform. We have no intention of doing that, nor do most Members who are more concerned with the needs of their constituents. In my opinion, the Hon. Member should have taken the suggestion of her leader with a grain of salt because, as I said earlier, he was just showing off.

I rather doubt that he is seriously determined to change the Senate. Her leader must come to grips with spiralling interest rates, Canada's weakest dollar ever, and an unacceptable unemployment rate, so he buries his head in the sand, like an ostrich, and uses the Senate in a diversionary tactic. But I repeat that if the Prime Minister, Hon. Members and the Minister of Justice have the political will to do something about it, we are open to suggestions, we are prepared to consider new ideas, and you may rest assured that we will not thwart the reform nor the initiative of the Hon. Member. We fully expect her Conservative colleagues to let the clock strike six o'clock without one of them rising to commend the efforts of the Hon. Member who introduced the motion, who thought her leader was serious and who wants to make a worthy contribution. The next few weeks will tell us whether she was right to take the matter seriously. She made a very good speech, we congratulate her and we hope that Members of the Cabinet will give the issue of Senate reform as much consideration as she does.

● (1740)

[English]

**Mr. Rod Murphy (Churchill):** Mr. Speaker, this is not the first time I have had an opportunity to discuss this subject. I was the New Democrat who served on the Joint Committee which studied the Senate last year. I must tell you, Mr. Speaker, that the longer I served on that committee the less respect I had for that institution. I am not speaking about individuals who are in the Senate; individually they are quite acceptable and have great personal track records. However, collectively, the Senate is something which really does not belong in a democratic society.

The image of overpaid Liberal and Conservative fund raisers, campaign managers and defeated or retired candidates who "work"—and I put that word in quotation marks—three days a week and do very little of value, is not too far from the truth. Not too many people realize that in an average week the Senate only sits three days. An average day is usually not a full day.

I feel, Mr. Speaker, that we are never going to get reform of that institution as long as it is in its present state. The very fact that the Senate exists means that we cannot have adequate reform of the Senate because there are too many vested

interests in keeping the Senate. There is the vested interest of the Senators themselves, who obviously do not want to do away with what could be called a very "cushy" position. There is the vested interest of the Prime Minister who can obviously use the Senate to reward the political faithful as well as keep some people in line, because some day they may be offered some type of patronage award such as the Senate.

I notice that one of my colleagues who sat on the committee which studied Senate reform the Hon. Member for Halifax West (Mr. Peterson) is in the House. I remember that he was one of the Members of the Committee who had the courage at the end of that process to say that we really didn't need the kind of Senate reform which was envisioned and planned last year. What we got after months of study, and after thousands of dollars spent on transporting that committee from province to province across this land, was a report which indicated how difficult and how impossible it is to reform the Senate of this country. The report was supported by all of the Senators, most of the Conservative Members of Parliament and, of course, most of the Liberals—who were the Government at that time—on the committee. It made one of the most ridiculous suggestions in terms of reform of the Senate. It suggested that we have Senators elected for one nine-year term and that they would not be eligible for re-election. I would like to quote from the report itself. The full committee report stated:

We realize that Senators who serve for a single term would not be obliged to account for their actions to their electorate at a subsequent election.

In other words, Mr. Speaker, one of the values many of the Senators say, as well as the majority of the Conservatives and Liberals, was that these people would be elected once and would never be accountable to the people again. Is that democracy? Is that what we are talking about in this country?

It is even worse than that, Mr. Speaker. I am going to refer to one of the earlier drafts of that Senate reform report which indicates that attitude, and I quote:

The committee recognizes that Senators would "not be obliged to account for their action". Earlier versions of the report talked of the "threat" of not being re-elected—

The whole concept of that committee was that the Senate was some kind of elitist body that should not be accountable to the public. Other recommendations were just as objectionable. Instead of clearing out the hundred and some Senators who are appointed at the present time, it was suggested that they be phased out so that in three years time we would elect one third of the new Senators; the other two thirds of appointed Senators would stay. And they would have control of the new elected Senate. How can one actually accept reform when the very nature of the reform about which you talk guarantees that appointed Senators would have control of a new and a more powerful Senate? That would scare anyone who believes in democracy.

One of the Senators who did not agree with the recommendations suggested that the report itself was sabotaged, that the report itself was made to guarantee that it would never be accepted by the Liberal Government at that time, or any other Government, and that it had so many holes in it that anyone