

*Suggested Senate Reform*

The amendment, as amended, would read:

The government should give consideration to initiating the necessary consultation and inquiry respecting the steps to be taken to secure the abolition of the Senate.

I think I have said about all I want to say on the matter; but let no one say that there are no alternatives to our bicameral system. There is in the Kingdom of Norway an elective single chamber, which is divided, as it were, into a bicameral system. It is working well there, and anyone who is familiar with the Scandinavian countries knows that there are no more democratic and progressive peoples than the peoples of the Scandinavian countries. In this constitution of Norway the Norwegians give us an indication of how a reviewing and reconsidering chamber can be set up which will do all that the Senate of Canada does and be directly responsible to the people.

I am not going into the question of saving the country a great deal of money, but that is a factor that should be reconsidered. Unquestionably, the time has come when a drastic review of the Senate, in my opinion, can only be carried out thoroughly by the abolition of the Senate of Canada, and the study of reconsideration and review of legislation somewhat along similar lines adopted by the very democratic and progressive Kingdom of Norway.

**Mr. Solon E. Low (Peace River):** Mr. Speaker, there is not a great deal that one can say at a time like this without some rather intensive preparation, and I must say that I did not have the opportunity to do that. However, there are a few comments I should like to make, especially since the C.C.F. have introduced an amendment to the amendment which was moved by the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Drew).

There is no doubt at all that the Senate has declined in popularity in Canada over the years. In the minds of the people they do not occupy the same position that they held years ago when this country was new and when our federal form of government was first introduced. The question of what has caused the decline should occupy our attention. Some hold that the Senate needs reforming because the Senate itself has gone bad. Other people have different views. I have given considerable thought to the question. In my mind the question is this: Is reform of the Senate the important necessity, or is reform of the government's attitude toward the Senate what is necessary? I am not so sure that the Senate itself is in need of such reform as that the government needs to change its views with regard to the work

[Mr. Coldwell.]

that should be given the Senate today. At least that is one of the big considerations in this whole matter.

When Canada first adopted the bicameral system it was thought that the Senate would fit into the federal constitution, particularly as the champion of provincial rights, and for a time the Senate did fill that function, and filled it well. It filled the function of a brake on hasty legislation so long as the complexion of the Senate was somewhat different from the complexion of the House of Commons. In these latter years of course the complexion of the Senate has become exactly that of the House of Commons, and it has remained so for quite a number of years. As a consequence, many people feel that the Senate cannot fulfil a real and useful function.

Well, let us look at this question of the use which is made of it. The Senate is prepared to undertake whatever work it can do. It has already been said we have accumulated in that house a great deal of experience, men of real stature, broad experience and good minds—and women of course. Now, why accumulate that experience and that ability in a second chamber if it is not being used properly? I hope I am not attempting to cast any reflection on the senators, indeed that is not my intention; but if we look at this thing realistically we will see that as long as the senators are given menial political tasks to do they are going to continue to decline in popularity and in the support of the people.

For example, it is far beneath the dignity of a senator, and far beneath what he should be given to do, to have him go through a constituency of this country doing the footwork of a political page boy, rounding up political support to unseat a member of this house simply because that member does not belong to the party which supports the government.

I am speaking from experience. One of them did that in my own constituency. But I do not care about that. From my own point of view, if he had stayed longer I would simply have had a bigger majority. But the point is that he was there, a member of the Senate, evidently sent by the party to whom he felt he owed allegiance, to do the menial political tasks which should be done by someone completely detached from the Senate.

As long as that sort of thing is the kind of work the government gives to senators they will continue to decline in popularity until the people of this country will demand that the Senate be abolished.