

Abolition of Senate

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): My hon. friend from Nanaimo-Cowichan-The Islands (Mr. Douglas) suggests that it be a museum. That is what it is now. When I first came here, one of the current stories was that the hon. member for Nanaimo-Cowichan-The Islands used to take guests into the gallery of the Senate when that place was in session. The story is that on one occasion he took some guests in and said to them, "This is our waxworks. That is what those figures are down there." The guests sat quietly for a moment, looking at the various figures. Finally, one of them turned to the hon. member for Nanaimo-Cowichan-The Islands and said, "I just saw one of them move." That is his story, not mine.

Another point that may be made is that I am coming at the question this time by means of an amendment to the British North America Act, and maybe I should wait until the constitution is brought home and redone. I accept that argument, in a sense. I have been waiting a long while to get rid of the Senate, so I could wait another year or two. But do not put that up as an argument against abolishing the Senate. If we believe in democracy in Canada, we must have it as soon as we can by having a parliament made up only of persons elected by and responsible to the people of Canada.

I admit this is not the first time I have brought in this measure. I have been at this ever since the day I came here, which was quite a while ago. Sometimes it is said to me that I am not making much progress because the Senate is still there. I do not accept that. I think I have done rather well. The other day I looked at the list of persons who were in the Senate when I came here about 35 years ago. There are only three of them left. Two of them are in their eighties and one is in his nineties. Therefore, I have pretty well got rid of the Senate as it was when I came here.

I hope this House will have enough sense to take a stand today for the complete abolition of the Senate, so that parliament and Canada can be a place of real democracy.

● (1722)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Maurice Dupras (Parliamentary Secretary to Secretary of State for External Affairs): Mr. Speaker, I thank you for giving me the opportunity to take part for the second or perhaps the third time in a debate on the bill of my colleague and friend, the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) dealing with the abolition of the Senate. No personal interest can be imputed to me, Mr. Speaker. If I contribute to this debate it is not because I am interested in being appointed to the Senate; considering my young age, it will be obvious that the reason for my intervention is not based on personal interest. In my opinion, the comments of my learned colleague show that he has improved his position which seems much more comprehensive than it was in 1974, 1971 and 1968. He does not say that senators are old parliamentarians who do not serve their country as much as they should.

Mr. Speaker, it has often been said that the Senate is inadequately used, underpaid and undervalued and this for many reasons. One need only look at those who make up the

Senate here in Canada. Personally, Mr. Speaker, as the majority of my colleagues, and certainly as my colleague from Winnipeg North Centre, I have a great deal of admiration and respect for the greatest majority of senators, and I have friends among senators on both sides of that House. Also, this admiration and respect are based on their contribution, not only to national unity, not only by the work they achieve, but also by the great quality of their contribution. Let us consider, for instance, the work done by Senator Lamontagne and his committee, the accomplishments of the committee on poverty, the committee on telecommunications, which have been a guide for the members of this House and a help in presenting and drafting bills that now serve the people of Canada.

Let us look also at those who make up the Senate. Of course, there are former politicians, but there are some elsewhere and I shall refer to them later. We find former members of the House of Commons as well as legislative assemblies across Canada. And then, we find former mayors who, let us face it, make a very important contribution because they proceed in a different way, having different views from the members of the House of Commons when drafting our legislation. There are university, academic and business people who have been successful and it is not yet a crime to be successful in Canada. And if the Canadian government institution can benefit from advantages and sound advice from those who have succeeded in business in Canada, I think we would be ill-advised indeed not to take advantage of those skills, those resources which are available to us. And that is what the Senate is doing when one considers its membership.

It also includes Canadians from all parts and all classes of the country. There are Indians, natives, Canadians from all provinces and we know that they are 102 members altogether. And what does it mean to the Canadian population? As for us, I will talk about it later on. But for some parts of the country such as Prince Edward Island for instance, one of the reasons which prompted that province to be part of the confederation was that it would be protected by the Canadian Senate. And it is stated in the Canadian constitution that no less than an equal number of members in the House of Commons, an equal number of members of the Senate will be in the House of Commons.

And this condition is very important to ensure national unity and guarantee rights. I notice that one of my hon. colleagues does not share my views. Perhaps he could rise after me and indicate where he feels what I have said does not reflect reality, and that Prince Edward Island joined the Canadian confederation because it felt protected by this provision of the constitution whereby an equal number of members of the House of Commons must come from this part of the country. This protection was due to the fact that it had a permanent number of members in the Senate.

I must also mention the quality of contributions by my hon. colleagues in the other place. That quality evolves naturally from their very high degree of independence. Our Canadian society is facing difficulties and there is a rush for greater and greater political power, not necessarily on the part of politi-