

Supply—Legislation

In recent years some proposals have been made by two governments with regard to what they have called reform of the Senate. One proposal was presented by the Conservative government to retire senators at age 75, and one was presented by the present government to retire at 75 only those senators appointed subsequent to the passage of a law providing that senators will retire at age 75. This sort of bland, anaemic, reformatory approach really will not result in anything worth while in regard to the institution itself. In fact, I do not think it is amenable to reformation. It might even be considered incorrigible or beyond reform. Perhaps we should toss up our hands, admit that there is no possibility of reform and accede to the suggestion of this party that the institution itself be abolished, because in the whole scheme of things it is relatively useless.

Perhaps one could argue that it does perform one service, and I suppose this would depend upon which party one belongs to, in that in recent years the former governor of the Bank of Canada, James Coyne, gained his day in court which I agree was denied him by the Conservative government of the day, and denied him in a most reprehensible fashion. On the other hand, there was a Liberal majority in the Senate who saw fit to reflect the political atmosphere that existed in the House of Commons. If there had been a Conservative majority in the Senate, I do not believe anyone could argue that James Coyne would have had his day in court. The Conservative majority in the Senate, if it had existed at that time, would have carried out the edict of the government of the day and would have refused the governor his democratic rights under our free society. It could not even be argued that the Senate qualify by performing a useful function because it performed a useful function only by reason of the fact there was a Liberal majority who wanted to carry out the political fight that had been conducted in this chamber, incidentally not only by the Liberal party at that time but by the C.C.F. members who numbered some eight or nine on that occasion.

Now, there have been suggestions of alterations in the Senate, as I have stated, dating back to the time when Sir John A. Macdonald was prime minister. This was almost 100 years ago now. For many years, therefore, everybody, particularly prime ministers who have been asked to deal with this question, has said, yes, there needs to be some change in the structure of the Senate. In fact,

I have a book here I obtained from the library entitled "Senate Reform", and it contains a reprint of a speech delivered by one C. Berkeley Powell, Esq., M.L.A. in the legislative assembly at Toronto, dated March 21, 1899. It is interesting to note that the legislature at that time had presented to it a motion by the attorney general, who incidentally was then a Liberal, with respect to the Senate of Canada. One of the provisions was that the British North America Act should be amended so as to provide that senators should be appointed or chosen for a limited term of years only, and not for life as at present. It is interesting to note that 66 years later we are still toying around with the idea of placing a limit on the term of years a person can serve in the Senate, but we have not got around to it yet.

I was amused also to note that in this book there are 14 pages that deal with the Senate and what it had accomplished at that time, what they thought were some of its worth-while attributes. Then, there are 147 pages that deal with the worth-while aspects of the Senate and the things which make it a commendable institution. Those 147 pages are absolutely blank. There is nothing on them, and to me that is an indication of the value of the Senate itself. It, likewise, has accomplished nothing worthy that could be marked up on the credit balance side. Rather than use my own words, I should like to make a brief quotation from an article written by John N. Turner, who at that time was associated with Stikeman & Elliott, barristers and solicitors in the city of Montreal. On page 57 of this particular book entitled "Essays in Honour of Henry F. Angus", there is an article entitled, "The Senate of Canada—Political Conundrum". I quote—and this pretty well summarizes everything that has been said about the usefulness of the Senate:

Today the debates in the upper house are so dull, dreary, and futile that the press rarely thinks it worth while to give them any coverage. Even more symptomatic of its decay is the political fact that recent governments of the day seem to have abandoned and ignored it. Saddest fact of all, the Senate has become an object of ridicule. Cynics call it the most exclusive club in the country, a haven of old men, retired politicians, and contributors to party funds.

The Chairman: Order; the hon. member who has the floor now is well aware of standing order 35 which says that no member may use offensive words against either house. The hon. member may argue that these are not his words, but he knows he