

The Special Senate Committee on the Clerestory of the Senate Chamber

Evidence

Ottawa, Thursday, October 30, 1975.

The Special Committee of the Senate on the Clerestory of the Senate Chamber met this day at 10 a.m. to consider the question of the installation of stained glass windows in the clerestory of the Senate Chamber.

Senator John J. Connolly (*Chairman*) in the Chair.

The Chairman: Honourable senators, we have with us this morning a man who has been recommended to us very highly by the President of the Royal Canadian Academy of the Arts. Our witness is Mr. Gerald E. Tooke. Mr. Tooke was born in the United Kingdom, not very long ago as my time runs. He received his early education in Canterbury, and then studied architecture at the Canterbury College of Art. Mr. Tooke was a pilot officer in the Royal Air Force from 1952 to 1954. Subsequent to coming to Canada in 1954 he studied at the University of Toronto and simultaneously opened his own stained glass sculpture and church furnishing design studios in Toronto. Some ten or eleven years later he joined the staff of the present Minister of Finance, who was then the President of the Privy Council, and served in the public sector. In 1971 he even ran as a provincial candidate in Ontario. He has produced a number of written works, including one in the field of politics called *Politics are People*. Since 1964 he has been an academician of the Royal Canadian Academy. He is the past president of the Ontario Craft Foundation. He is now at Algonquin College here in Ottawa. People at the Royal Canadian Academy of the Arts have said that he is one of the foremost designers and producers in Canada of stained glass windows.

I am sure we are all most grateful to him for coming here this morning to enlighten us upon the project upon which we have embarked. We feel we are very fortunate indeed, Mr. Tooke, to have you with us. We welcome you, and I would ask you now to proceed with what you propose to tell the committee.

Mr. Gerald E. Tooke, Head, Department of Visual Arts, Algonquin College of Arts, Ottawa: Honourable senators, the importance of these windows cannot, I think, be understated. In Canada there are very few opportunities for good design, and especially for design on the scale that is available here in the Senate. I think the importance of how the windows are done, the kind of design that is used and the subjects used in them cannot be understated. The publicity that accrues from an opportunity like this can be considerable.

I think it is basically important that the windows be of an importance transcending the historical subjects that are put in them. I see the project as being probably the most serious project in stained glass that has occurred in Canada, apart from the windows in the House of Commons, perhaps for the last ten or fifteen years. It is possible

that in the future stained glass could again emerge in Canada as a medium to be used in public buildings as much as it has been used in church buildings. As a stained glass designer, I certainly believe there has been very little interesting work to do for a fairly long period of time. Churches, very sensibly I think, have used their money, not on less frivolous things but on things more in keeping with what are their direct objectives.

I hope that it will be possible in perhaps four or five years' time to look at the windows in the Senate and to think back to my having been involved, to some small extent, and be very glad that I was involved, and to be excited to see those windows.

What I have done is to examine the various aspects and, if I may, I would like to talk on two areas first of all: one, the technical aspects to the windows—and that is not just the size of the windows and the installation problems but the problems for the designer; and, two, my suggestions as to how you might appoint the artist because I understand there is some question as to how this could be done. It is certainly one of the points that has been brought up to me.

First, you know the windows very well yourselves, of course, but I reckon the total to be roughly 980 square feet. This includes the main lights themselves and tracery for each window. It is a job of considerable size for any stained glass person. By comparison, the largest windows I have done have been 1,200 square feet, and that is over the last 20 years in Canada. So, you can see that in relationship to that it is a big commission and a large project.

The installation problems are not enormous. I have examined the windows, and they would be installed from outside, which is not too difficult because you have the roof to work from. So, when the windows are actually going in, there will not be too much interference with the Senate chamber itself. Some work would have to be done inside but the majority could be done from the outside.

The present windows are very poor glass and rather discordant colours. You may well have become used to them over the years, but looking at them anew and from the point of view of their being changed, I felt that there were very discordant colours that would actually cast a light which, if it were not conditioned by the large chandeliers in the chamber, would give you a warm summer's afternoon glow even on a cold winter morning, which is not quite what it should be. My feeling is that the ambient light which is cast by a window should, in fact, be a natural light.

The Chairman: You should have seen the predecessors of the present windows, all they had on them was a little green paint and over a period of 40 or 50 years—it wasn't perhaps that long—

Senator Beaubien: The paint had worn off.