

Senate reform which has not already been fully discussed and considered by previous commissions, by a Senate committee and even by the group which went to Australia in September?

Hon. H. A. Olson (Leader of the Government): Honourable senators, the Leader of the Opposition has partly answered his own question in that he described a number of groups, organizations, studies, and so on, that have been appointed over a number of years with regard to Senate reform. The Pepin-Robarts commission had some comments on the matter as did the Goldenberg-Lamontagne committee report.

Senator Flynn: And Bill C-60.

Senator Asselin: And the judgement of the Supreme Court.

Senator Olson: Views have also been expressed by the group of senators who went to Australia, though we have not debated the matter in this chamber.

But to get back to the specific question, I think what the Honourable Donald Macdonald said is that within the terms of reference of the Royal Commission on the Economic Union and Development Prospects for Canada he would take into consideration the influence of national institutions, including the Senate, with respect to modifications which might be useful in an economic development sense.

Senator Flynn: My specific question is: Will the government wait until we receive the report before deciding on the matter?

Senator Olson: I am not sure that that is implied. I suppose some changes could be made on the recommendation of the government, or changes could be undertaken by the Senate itself in terms of the effectiveness and relevancy of this institution with respect to economic development. Both scenarios are possible. I do not think that the terms of reference of the commission pre-empt any action from being taken until after it has reported.

Senator Flynn: So my understanding is that presently the government has no immediate plan in this regard?

Senator Olson: What the honourable senator should understand is what I said, namely, that the government and other bodies, including the Senate itself, may take an initiative with respect to some improvement—call it “reform”, if you like—as to its relevancy to the service that we are obliged to provide to Canadians. What I said was that the government has given no undertaking that there will be no changes—

Senator Flynn: Nor to the contrary.

Senator Olson:—until the Macdonald Commission has reported.

Hon. Andrew Thompson: Honourable senators, I have a supplementary question for the Leader of the Government. I may be out of touch—as I am much of the time—but the Leader of the Government referred to the group that went to Australia. May I have some clarification as to what group went to Australia and under what authority they went there?

Senator Marshall: You should come to our caucus meetings.

Senator Olson: Honourable senators, I will undertake to bring that information to the chamber tomorrow. Perhaps I was somewhat naive in believing that this matter was well-known to every honourable senator in the place.

Senator Thompson: I know that Senator Frith went on this trip, and I appreciate the interest shown in studying countries that have an elected Senate, but I am wondering whether this group had an official designation and, if so, under what authority.

Senator Olson: I shall bring more information to the chamber tomorrow, but it is my understanding that the group went to Australia in response to an invitation. I do not think that it was a formally appointed group authorized to do a study and to report, but merely a group that went there in response to an invitation so that we would have some highly perceptive and intelligent senators—

Senator Frith: Or in their absence, the substitute for same.

Senator Olson:—who had observed the situation there, and who would be able to give us the benefit of their observations.

Senator Thompson: I do not know who the members of the group were, but if they were senators then I can appreciate that they are valuable and intelligent. Was the invitation from the Australian government?

Senator Olson: I shall find out for the honourable senator, and provide the information tomorrow.

Senator Marshall: I have a supplementary question for the Leader of the Government. Will he also find out whether there will be investigations of the second chambers in the United Kingdom, Barbados, Zimbabwe, India, Malaysia and New Zealand?

Hon. C. William Doody: Honourable senators, further to the supplementary question of Senator Marshall, if such is the case could I be one of the intelligent so-and-sos selected to go?

Senator Frith: If you can leave out the adjectives, you are under consideration.

Senator Flynn: And you can join Senator Frith.

Hon. Orville H. Phillips: Honourable senators, I have a supplementary question arising out of Senator Flynn's question. Was the chairman of the commission speaking on behalf of the government when he said he doubted that we needed a bicameral system.

Senator Olson: Honourable senators, I will have to take that question as notice. I am not aware that the chairman said that. The reason I could reply to Senator Flynn so quickly and completely is that I happened to watch the same television program he watched.

● (1450)

Senator Flynn: You were given time to think because of the interventions of Senator Guay. That is why you could reply so readily.