

Senator Watt: It worries me when the honourable leader says "not at this time." Why can these discussions not take place at this time? Why is it that aboriginal peoples must take a back seat when dealing with the question of unity?

Aboriginal peoples are the basis of this country. The federal government should recognize the aboriginal peoples of this country once and for all, rather than merely referring to only two founding nations. For that reason, aboriginal peoples must be involved in this process.

Senator Lynch-Staunton: The government takes you for granted, that is why.

Senator Fairbairn: I firmly support my honourable friend's position on the importance of the aboriginal peoples in this country, and their role in the debate on national unity. The issues currently before the House of Commons relate strictly to the commitments made during the referendum by the Prime Minister: nothing more and nothing less. In constitutional terms, the position of aboriginal peoples is absolutely secure.

ETHICS COUNSELLOR

DESIRABILITY OF INDEPENDENT COUNSELLOR REPORTING TO PARLIAMENT—GOVERNMENT POSITION

Hon. Gerald J. Comeau: Honourable senators, today's *Montreal Gazette* and *La Presse* contained a propaganda insert from the Liberal Party of Canada, seeking to collect funds. The insert makes reference to Red Book promises that have been kept by the government. One such promise, in particular, was that an independent ethics counsellor would be appointed, after consultation with leaders of all parties in the House of Commons, and would report directly to Parliament.

Honourable senators, while in fact an ethics counsellor has been appointed, he is not independent. He reports to the Prime Minister, not to Parliament.

An October 27, 1994 editorial in *The Toronto Star* called this the most blatant betrayal of the Red Book promises. It observed that the inevitable result would be to have an ethics watchdog loyal to his political master, not to the public.

Honourable senators, to make the ethics counsellor truly independent as was promised, would the government consider changing reporting arrangements so that the counsellor reports to Parliament and not simply to the Prime Minister?

Hon. Joyce Fairbairn (Leader of the Government): Honourable senators, I will convey my honourable friend's question to the Prime Minister and others in the government. I would simply say to my honourable friend that the ethics counsellor who was appointed, Mr. Howard Wilson, is a very

responsible individual, and carries out his duties with the utmost care.

Senator Comeau: I do not wish in any way to suggest that this gentleman would not apply due diligence to his job, but we must remember that he who pays the piper calls the tunes.

Given that the Prime Minister pays this gentleman's salary, would it not be more appropriate to have someone who is viewed, at least by the public, as being independent? In keeping with the spirit of suggestions which we will be making, I suggest the Auditor General of Canada, Mr. Desautels, be considered for appointment. Certainly no one questions his pursuit of integrity.

Senator Fairbairn: Honourable senators, I will convey that question as well to my honourable colleagues. I am sure that my honourable friend did not intend to imply anything by his comments, but the current ethics councillor is not dancing to anybody's tune but, rather, to the mandate which he has been given.

EXISTENCE OF JOINT COMMITTEE ON CODE OF CONDUCT

Hon. Peter Bosa: I rise on a supplementary question, honourable senators.

Is the Honourable Leader of the Government aware that there is a joint Senate-House of Commons committee studying the code of conduct at the present time, and that members are free to attend those meetings?

Senator Berntson: I would be very surprised if she was not aware.

Senator Bosa: Are you aware?

Senator Berntson: Yes, I am aware.

Don't disappoint us. You are aware, right?

Hon. Joyce Fairbairn (Leader of the Government): Honourable senators, I am very much aware of the committee, as I am sure are all my colleagues in this chamber. This issue touches all of us. I know that the joint committee will conduct itself incisively, will not be dancing to anybody's tune and will be concentrating on its mandate.

[Later]

JOINT COMMITTEE ON CODE OF CONDUCT— RELEVANCE TO PARLIAMENTARIANS

Hon. Finlay MacDonald: Honourable senators, Senator Bosa has raised a rather interesting point. Every once in a while we must go through a code of conduct operation. I suppose it is like a trade association in that, when it prints its code of ethics, it makes them feel warm all over.