

[English]

Senator Perrault: I am aware that this committee met, and a distinguished committee it was, made up of representatives of all political parties. Indeed, the Honourable Senator Molgat made a distinguished contribution as chairman of that committee, as I recall, for most of its life.

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear.

Senator Perrault: The report and views of that committee are being studied very seriously in the context of present events. However, I think that the terms of reference of a proposed Senate committee, or a proposed joint committee of the two houses, would be somewhat different from the terms of reference of that previous committee, which directed its efforts towards a discussion of major constitutional changes.

Senator Asselin: This new committee would be dealing with the same matter.

Senator Perrault: At the present time I am not able to divulge to the chamber what possible new terms of reference for the committee are involved, but I do not believe that the intention would be to duplicate the excellent and distinguished work done by that previous committee.

Senator Manning: When the Leader of the Government is considering this matter, would he give special thought to the wisdom of having a very broad debate on the subject in this chamber before anything in the way of terms of reference, or even a course of procedure, such as a committee of this house or a joint committee, is decided upon? I think there is wisdom in that course, because once terms of reference are set or a committee is appointed it to some extent circumscribes the broad scope of the subject that is of concern to all of us. It seems to me that it would be helpful to the government and to this chamber if the initial step were a general discussion in this house, in which honourable senators could express their considered viewpoints on courses of action that might be helpful, prior to any terms of reference being agreed upon for a course of specific and detailed study at a later date.

Senator Perrault: The honourable senator has advanced a very relevant idea. Clearly a major debate of this kind is in order, whether it is held in connection with a resolution that may come before the Senate or whether another setting can be evolved for such a debate. In any case, unquestionably it is important to have the kind of wide-ranging debate suggested by the honourable senator.

That, I believe, is the consensus of honourable senators, regardless of party affiliation here. I think we all wish to be certain that the terms of reference developed for such a committee, either a Senate committee or a joint committee, will usefully serve the nation at this particular time in its history.

Senator Smith (Colchester): Pursuing the same line of thought, honourable senators, I wonder if I might ask the Leader of the Government this question. If by any chance Senator Manning's suggestion is not accepted—I sincerely hope it will be—will there be an opportunity for at least a

broad range of discussion? All Canadians are concerned with this matter, not merely those who happen to sit on one side or other of the Speaker's chair.

Senator Perrault: I agree with the honourable senator. I appreciate the expression of his viewpoint, he having served as leader of a provincial government, and Senator Manning having done the same in the great province of Alberta. I would be prepared to sit down this week with the Leader of the Opposition and discuss the possibility of scheduling such a debate and its format, because it involves us all, regardless of our affiliation. I would be prepared to do that.

Senator Fournier (de Lanaudière): Honourable senators, if I may be permitted to express my opinion with respect to this subject, it is, very simply, that we should mind our own business. What is happening in the province of Quebec concerns only the people of the province of Quebec.

Some Hon. Senators: No, no.

Senator Fournier (de Lanaudière): They will decide upon their fate, and I do not wonder about the manner in which they will decide; they will be on the level. The vast majority of people in Quebec are not in favour of separatism. If we ever have a real problem of separatism in Canada, it will not come from Quebec. Take my word; we will be on the level. Let us take care of our own affairs; let us mind our own business and carry on with the business of the country. That is all we have to do.

Senator Flynn: The debate has not started yet, I suggest.

Senator Perrault: In any case, there may be some merit in honourable senators from various regions of Canada expressing their views with respect to national unity, which does not relate only to the relations of any one province with Confederation. All regions of Canada have their own aspirations and problems. As I have said, the question of a debate is one which I would quite willingly discuss with the Leader of the Opposition.

PENSION ACT

BILL TO AMEND—SECOND READING

The Senate resumed from Wednesday, April 27, the debate on the motion of Senator Carter for the second reading of Bill C-11, to amend the Pension Act.

Hon. Orville H. Phillips: Honourable senators, the sponsor of Bill C-11 stated that it simply amends one section of the Pension Act. This is the disappointing aspect of this bill—it makes very minor amendments to the Pension Act. The operation and effectiveness of the Canadian Pension Commission and veterans' legislation need a complete and thorough review.

In the background material which Senator Carter was kind enough to provide he mentioned the "benefit of the doubt" clause. After 60 years, the "benefit of the doubt" clause is as vague and as meaningless as a Liberal campaign promise. In fact, it is very similar to a Liberal campaign promise, in that it is brought out every four or five years, dusted off, then put