

Abolition of the Senate

Mr. Blais: That sounds very reasonable, if one follows the hon. member's argument to the fullest extent. I suggest to the hon. member that the Senate does not exercise the power which this House exercises. I agree that constitutionally, save and except for money bills, it has equal or parallel power. However, and I am sure the hon. member will agree with this as well, in practice the other place does not exercise that power. As a matter of fact, the power Senators exercised with regard to the wiretap bill was indeed an aberration from their past practice. There is no doubt in the mind of anyone in this House, except perhaps that of the hon. member, that in the future the Senate will not employ those powers that are afforded to it under the constitution.

In my view there is no difficulty in the fact there may be some Senators from the province of Alberta who sit in the Liberal caucus and are perhaps able to indicate, in the absence of other members, what feelings might be in that province. They may be able to render service in that manner. That does not mean there is any member in this House from Alberta who sits in this particular party. Nor do they have a legislative influence in this particular House.

If I call a Senator's constituent in the province of Alberta in order to seek advice relating to a particular matter which is before this House—and I understand we are going to be studying a bill affecting oil and the administration of an oil policy—I cannot see how that could be detrimental to my particular function. Whether that person is in Alberta or sitting in the Senate, I fail to see the difference.

Mr. Heath Macquarrie (Hillsborough): Mr. Speaker, as I listened to the last exchange it went through my mind that one of the glories of the other place is that there is no time limit on speeches.

I indicated to the venerable and honourable member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) two years ago that I might support him in 23 years time. Now, at the age of 54, I think I will need to have another 21 years before I jump to the support of such a suggestion.

Mr. Stanfield: Sober second thought.

Mr. Macquarrie: Yes. After two years of thinking it over, I am still reluctant to agree with him. The hon. member and I agree on many important things, but I think our disagreement today indicates the basic difference between a doctrinaire and a pragmatic reformer. A doctrinaire looks at an institution in society. If he does not find it working perfectly or extremely well, he says scrap it. The pragmatic reformer, the base and core of the Progressive Conservative Party of Canada, looks at an institution in society, either political or economic, and says the criterion is performance; therefore we come forward with suggestions to improve it.

It strikes me as an exercise in fatalism to say there is not sufficient ingenuity in the Canadian political province to develop in the Senate a place that is workable, valuable, and contributes importantly to our political process.

As the hon. member mentioned, this whole question of bicameralism is an old story. Most political organizations have decided on bicameral legislatures. There have been a

[Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre).]

variety of suggestions for change. Down through history some have become unicameral and have gone back to bicameralism.

I think the hon. member mentioned some of the functions which have been performed by another type of element in our political structure. The primacy, of course goes to the elected one accepting representative responsibility. That is fundamental. However, there are many parts of the governmental structure, and these were alluded to by the hon. member who preceded me, which are not of that kind. In the whole process the Senate fits in as something between that at the apex and that which is at the foundation, that is the ground and the elected House.

● (1740)

I believe that instead of tossing out the Senate we should ask for some good will and some wisdom in the appointment of the members thereof, and put that illustrious body to more work. I have often thought there are far too many legislative schemes launched in this House. Much could be done over there. When you are faced with a bill of 117 pages, and an agenda such as is usually before us in this portion of the parliamentary year, the situation surely calls for more spadework to be done over there.

I, too, join the hon. member in praising some of the excellent work which has been done by the Senate committees. I believe the Senate foreign affairs study on the Caribbean Commonwealth is one of the finest examinations ever conducted in an important area of Canadian foreign policy. I go back to the old question which Sir George Foster raised long before I was born, before even the hon. member was born—God help us, it is a long time ago. But he said: "End it or mend it." I am not so bereft of hope as to believe there is no possibility of mending it. I am not suggesting it is only a matter of a few judicious and thoughtful appointments from this place to the other place, although the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Stanfield) is here. But, of course, it is a matter of personnel.

One amusing remark was made by the speaker who moved this motion, though he did not look upon the subject as being a humorous one. He said he felt sympathy for Senators. Well, Mr. Speaker, I have looked at those Senators all my life and I have never felt they were objects of sympathy. Envy, perhaps, but not sympathy. At the tender age of 54 I would not go along with the hon. member for Nipissing (Mr. Blais) in suggesting that there be some changes in the age limits, both upward and downward. A man of 30 is not really an oldtimer, and you can get in there when you are 30. As to the \$4,000, naturally, as an impecunious professor I am not in favour of scrapping that. But, on a more serious note, the need is to look more realistically and more carefully at the structure and basis of representation.

More consideration ought to be given to the provinces as units, and a structural limitation might be placed upon the untrammelled choice open to Prime Ministers, far too many of whom have looked upon it as an exercise in the most sophisticated patronage. It is not the institution, it is the way in which the institution has been caused to function. Because I wish to hear from some of my hon. friends I shall say only, by way of conclusion that I believe the hon. member is a little too reckless, a little too