

Senate Reform

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McCleave): I am not sure that it is a point of order and I am not sure it is not a point of debate. In any event, it may be recognized as being five o'clock, and that being so, pursuant to the order made on Friday, February 27, 1976, the House will now proceed to the consideration of private member's business as listed on today's order paper, namely, notices of motions.

PROCEEDINGS ON ADJOURNMENT MOTION

[English]

SUBJECT MATTER OF QUESTIONS TO BE DEBATED

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McCleave): Before I put the notice of motion agreed to for today, it is my duty, pursuant to Standing Order 40, to inform the House that the questions to be raised at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Perth-Wilmot (Mr. Jarvis)—Canadian Broadcasting Corporation—Reduction in farm broadcasting—Position of minister; the hon. member for Humber-St. George's-St. Barbe (Mr. Marshall)—Health—Request for expansion of pilot project for school milk program; the hon. member for Halifax-East Hants (Mr. McCleave)—Transport—Proposed removal of subsidy on export flour—Request for reconsideration.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' MOTIONS

[English]

HOUSE OF COMMONS

SUGGESTED INVESTIGATION BY COMMITTEE OF ROLE OF SENATE

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McCleave): It is the understanding of the Chair that notice of motion No. 2, in the name of the hon. member for Hamilton-West (Mr. Alexander), notice of motion No. 15, in the name of the hon. member for Hamilton-Wentworth (Mr. O'Sullivan), notice of motion No. 19, in the name of the hon. member for Laprairie (Mr. Watson), and notice of motion No. 20, in the name of the right hon. member for Prince Albert (Mr. Diefenbaker), shall stand at the request of the government.

Some hon. Members: Stand.

Mr. David Orlikow (Winnipeg North) moved:

That, in the opinion of this House, the government should give consideration to the appointment of a special committee of this House which shall have the power to hold hearings in various parts of Canada, take testimony and hire experts, with the following terms of reference: That it shall examine the role of the Senate within Parliament and its general constitutional functions and report with recommendations on whether the Senate should continue as it has been and is, or whether it should be abolished (and, if so, by what means) or whether some form of reformed Senate is worthwhile (and, if so, what reforms).

● (1700)

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am certain that members of this House will be surprised if I begin my short speech by making it very clear that personally I would prefer to see the Senate abolished.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Hear, hear!

Mr. Orlikow: However, I am extremely doubtful that such a proposal would meet with the favour of members of this House, either government members, some of whom hope to be appointed to the Senate in the very near future, or members of the official opposition who might hope to be appointed to the Senate in a few years from now. So because I do not believe that kind of motion could carry, I put forward a much milder resolution which is simply to suggest that a House of Commons committee look at the whole question of the Senate as it is now constituted, the role which it plays and the role which a reformed Senate, if such a thing is possible, might play.

If one were to make a study of second chambers which exist in the various countries in the world, one would find a number of things. First of all, we would find that second chambers have disappeared in many countries, and have disappeared in all provinces. I think there were five provinces in Canada which originally had second chambers. They have disappeared because the original idea of a second chamber, which developed when the parliamentary democratic system was being established, was that somehow the voters could not be trusted to choose a group of representatives who could really manage the affairs of the country, and that you had to have some second chamber constituted of wise, older people who could at least give second thought to the proposals being made by the elected representatives.

Those second chambers are disappearing in many countries and in many jurisdictions, and in all of them I know, with the exception of our Senate, the powers of the second chamber have been sharply limited. The best example I can give of that is the British experience beginning many years ago but certainly while Lloyd George was chancellor of the exchequer back in the early part of the twentieth century, around 1910, when he had, for that time, pretty drastic tax proposals to make which the House of Lords were opposing and which they had blocked for several years. The British government of the day got its legislation through by warning the members of the House of Lords that, if necessary, they would appoint a sufficient number of new members to the House of Lords who supported their proposals so that the legislation could be passed. From that day until today, gradually the power of the House of Lords in Great Britain has been whittled away. Most recently, the power of even delaying money bills was taken away from the House of Lords in Great Britain.

What was the original reason for having a Senate in Canada? MacGregor Dawson, in his definitive book on the government of Canada, in the chapter on the Senate, quotes Sir John A. Macdonald in the confederation debates as saying the following:

There would be no use of an Upper House if it did not exercise, when it thought proper, the right of opposing or amending or postponing the legislation of the Lower House. It would be of no value whatever were it a mere chamber for registering the decrees of the Lower House. It