

Suggested Senate Reform

taken away from the House of Lords in the mother of parliaments, means that we have a situation in this country which is archaic and entirely out of line with our democratic conceptions.

Then, may I proceed by reading further from the constitution of Norway, where it deals with procedure in connection with bills. It says:

When a bill from the Odelsting has twice been laid before the Lagting and has been a second time rejected by it, the whole Storting shall meet in joint session, and the bill is then disposed of by a majority of two-thirds of the votes.

Between each of these deliberations there shall be an interval of at least three days.

While that may appear to be a very short interval, it is sufficient because they meet in common session to come to a conclusion regarding it. To continue:

When a bill passed by the Odelsting has been approved by the Lagting or by the Storting in joint session, it shall be sent to the King, with a request that it may receive the King's assent.

And automatically that assent is given, as is shown by an earlier reading of the Norwegian constitution.

Here we have a modern democracy with one elected chamber divided into two parts, the second part doing the review and reconsideration which the Leader of the Opposition said this afternoon was the main function of the Senate of Canada.

And may I remind the house, and the Leader of the Opposition, that reform of the other place was, I believe, in the Liberal program adopted in the year 1919. Certainly it can be found in other programs of that party. As the Leader of the Opposition has said, from time to time members in the House of Commons have asked the government representing the Liberal party in power when this reform of the Senate was to be proceeded with. We have always had the same kind of reply.

I remember one occasion in 1925, 1926 or 1927—some time in the twenties—when the late Miss Agnes Macphail asked Mr. King when he was going to begin Senate reform, and Mr. King gave a reply which in some respects was not dissimilar to the one quoted this morning by the Leader of the Opposition. On that occasion, expressing some surprise, he said, "Well, I am reforming the Senate. As the Tory senators die I am appointing good Liberals in their places." We have now got to the stage where we have almost a single-party chamber in the other place. I believe there are today seven members of the official opposition in the other chamber. I do not say this with any disrespect to these gentlemen, but they are all

well on in years now and two of them I am told are in very poor health indeed. I am told that one or two of them may be taken from us at any time. Well, the situation is bad in every respect, because whenever there is a vacancy in the Senate there is a hopeful expression on some faces on the opposite side of the house, and they wonder who will be appointed to take the place of the deceased member of the other place.

Only the other day the voluntary health committee of parliament had an address from Dr. Segal, Montreal, on longevity. Someone suggested that longevity for members of parliament would be quite readily secured if they were appointed to the Senate. That seems to have been somewhat confirmed when you look over the gentlemen who sit there. I am not saying anything disrespectful to hon. members of the Senate. There are very able and very good people in the other chamber, and I want that clearly understood. But in these days, when we speak of democracy, when we speak of our democratic institutions and when we speak of responsibility to the people of Canada, how can we continue to approve of a chamber unrepresentative as far as elections are concerned, but equally unrepresentative of the various schools of thought in this country. Please bear in mind I am not making a plea for the appointment of any C.C.F. members to the other place. I say that because we believe that the Senate should be abolished. I want to make that perfectly clear; but it is quite unrepresentative of the various trends of thought politically in this country, and as such it is, it seems to me, entirely out of line with all our democratic institutions.

Someone asked, what could we do about divorce if it were not for the Senate? Well, I think that will have to be tackled apart from what we may do regarding the other place because of some of the cases that have been before the Senate committee and have slipped through this house lately. This is a reflection both on the other place, on this House of Commons and on parliament generally, so that should be no argument for continuing the present unrepresentative other house.

I should like to move an amendment, Mr. Speaker. I had only just a moment to look it over, but I move, seconded by the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles):

That the amendment be amended by deleting therefrom all the words after the word "respecting" and by substituting therefor the following words:
"the steps to be taken to secure the abolition of the Senate."