

Abolition of Senate

our parliamentary structure. I think if we do that we will realize it should be a democratic structure and that it is not democratic when we have one House made up of persons who are responsible to no one.

That is the picture as it developed out of the way the place was established. That was it from the beginning: a House of non-elected persons responsible to no one who, nevertheless, could set aside the legislation of the House of Commons. That carries with it, of course, the right to do so not just once, twice or several times but, as Eugene Forsey once said in an excellent paper calling for the abolition of the Senate, which he wrote before he went there—

An hon. Member: That was when he was still with the NDP.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): That is right. That is when he was with the CCF, as our party was then called, and the Canadian Labour Congress, or Canadian Congress of Labour as it was when he wrote that paper. I still send out copies of his memorandum to students who want material on the Senate, because it is one of the best jobs that has ever been done. The only person who ever characterized the Senate more forcibly as a complete waste of time was Gratton O'Leary, and that was before he went to the Senate.

● (1712)

An hon. Member: What about the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Whelan)?

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): I hear some reference to the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Whelan). I wish he were here some time when we have a vote on the other place, because he has expressed himself in the past as being just as opposed to the Senate as I am.

I have been talking about the Senate in terms of the structure that was a natural outgrowth of its establishment by the constitution back in 1867. I would like to make the point that two things have developed in recent decades that are really a blot on the other place. The first is that it has become a place where conflict of interest is really at its height. I do not have with me today—I do not have any papers here—the list of the directorships and presidencies of corporations that are enjoyed by members of the other place. The banking and financial interests of this country are extremely well represented in that other place.

Sometimes the Senate is referred to as an institution that is to protect the minorities. The only minority it protects is the rich. Of course, there have been politicians in this country who have said that the rich are a minority and have the right to protection. That is what the Senate has become. They have people there representing banks, financial institutions and corporations. The conflict of interest, therefore, is literally outrageous. On that score, it was not something that was envisaged when the Senate was established, but it has developed. It has become a place that we ought to have the sense to abolish.

[Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre).]

Something else has developed in the last few decades of a parallel nature which I think is a shame and disgrace. The Senate has become a place where the Liberal party arranges for its chief organizers and money collectors to be put on the public payroll. What is the number? How many presidents of the National Liberal Federation have been Senators? This means they are on full pay until age 75 and receive a generous pension after that. They are secure. They can do the work of the Liberal party. It has always been the case that people have been rewarded with positions in the Senate because they had served the party in power, or have made contributions to it. There are persons there today who do not need the money, but because they gave money to the party, they are there.

This business of having an institution paid for by the taxpayers of Canada as a place where the officers, organizers and bagmen of the Liberal party can be put on the public payroll is a disgrace. I go further: it is a scandal that the parliament of Canada is used in this way. This is an argument I know will appeal to my friends in the Progressive Conservative party. Maybe some of them, even though they would like to get over there some day, will feel so strongly with me on this point that they will support my bill. For all these reasons, the time has come for us to get rid of the other place.

Judging by former debates on this issue, there may be some who will agree with me about the basic principle which I am putting forward, namely, that non-elected persons should not have the authority that we have. The argument may be made that we could change it and have an elected Senate. At least it would be better than a non-elected Senate in terms of the principles of democracy. I do not have a closed mind with respect to that idea, but it would have to be considered in the whole context of what is good for this country.

We now have the conflict between the government and parliament right here in the House of Commons. We have the conflicts and confrontations that exist between the federal government and the provincial governments. If in addition to that, we had an upper chamber with moral authority to challenge our decisions, nothing would ever get done. If you had to get the federal government and the provincial governments together, if you had to get the federal government and the House of Commons seeing eye to eye, if you had to get the Senate and the House of Commons, both with equal authority, seeing eye to eye, I suggest nothing would ever be done. Just as some other countries have done away with their upper chambers, and just as all of our provinces have done away with them, we would do far better if we simply had one House of Commons comprising the Parliament of Canada. In order to be correct in terms of the legislation and in terms of my bill, parliament would consist of the Crown and the House of Commons.

What would we do with that other chamber? It is a beautiful room. Possibly it could be used for an art gallery. My friend from Edmonton Centre (Mr. Paproski) would probably suggest it would make an excellent gymnasium.

Mr. Douglas (Nanaimo-Cowichan-The Islands): Or museum.