

I believe we would all agree that when the tax reform bill went through the Senate in December the image of that body seemed to hit an all-time low in the eyes of many people. I was upset by that, because I think the Senate is, in fact, a useful body; with appropriate reform it could be reconstituted as a much more reputable and acceptable portion of our parliamentary system. I believe token efforts have been made by the government to do something which they would like to call reform inasmuch as they appointed a Social Creditor, on one occasion, and others, who are reputed to be Socialists, on a further occasion. But this does not amount to real reform. An attempt was also made to involve the Senate in make-work projects. I do not think this is reform, either.

Why has the other place fallen into some disrepute, or fallen out of favour with many Canadians? One reason might be the method of appointment of members of that body. As we all know, it is entirely the prerogative of the Prime Minister of the day to choose whoever he wants to fill vacancies, and usually he chooses old friends—either of himself or of his party. I do not have any objection to old friends; I have old friends myself and I respect and admire them. However, if the old friends are not the friends of the opposition party, then that party may consider they were not really a good choice for these appointments.

• (1650)

I do not want to imply that party workers and supporters of the Prime Minister's party are a bad choice as such, because I know most of the Senators personally and many of them are very fine people. However, I do think that the method of their appointment does put them in a position where they must often be on the defensive about their appointment with members of the public, and I think that this is something they should not have to face.

Another argument we often hear raised is that Senators are responsible to no one, that they do not have any constituents to worry about, and as a result after being in the other place for many years they might lose touch with the realities of Canadian life. Again that may or may not be a valid criticism, but it is a criticism we hear made from time to time. I am not suggesting that Senators should have constituencies as such. Perhaps members of the other place who are supposed to take a sober second look at legislation put before them should not be placed in a position where they are sensitive to certain pressures, as members of the House of Commons may be vis-à-vis their constituents. Therefore, in order for the Senators to have an unbiased view of any legislation that comes before them it is reasonable to argue that they should not be directly responsible to any constituency.

Within the past few months I have had the opportunity of speaking to members of legislatures from various countries. I had the privilege of attending a conference in Germany on the subject of pollution at which were present representatives from about 28 other countries. I talked to most of them about the structures of their Senates, their house of representatives, or whatever the case was, and with this kind of review I came up with some suggestions that I thought might be worth at least placing on the record so that perhaps some day action may be taken on them.

For example, let me take the case of the two extremes first. The members of the House of Lords in the United Kingdom are appointed in large numbers, most of whom are not active. At the present time I think there are something like 800 to 900 members of the House of Lords, of whom only 100 or less are active in the parliamentary system. They do not receive a salary of any sort but simply play their role on a voluntary basis, strictly out of interest for the system of parliamentary democracy.

The second extreme is the system used in the United States, our neighbours to the south, where Senators are elected for a six year term and carry a fairly large amount of prestige with their election. As a matter of fact, they also possess what appears to be a large amount of power. I think there is a very definite drawback to that situation. I may be wrong, but my impression is that the Senate of the United States or the upper house, if you like, has developed into a body which really overshadows the House of Representatives. Certainly, I should not like to see this happen to the House of Commons of Canada, since we are all members of the House and do not want to be overshadowed.

Therefore, we have to take a look at some system that falls between these two extremes. One of the complaints we have heard made about our parliament is that the House of Commons, as a natural result of the population distribution of this country, is in reality controlled by the two largest provinces, the provinces of Ontario and Quebec. Therefore, some of us who come from provinces other than these two feel at times that legislation is put forward in such a way as to give the two largest provinces more advantage than the western or Maritime provinces. As a result of this, there is legislation on the books that is in fact detrimental to the west and to the Maritimes. Let me give an example of what I mean. The freight rates in western Canada are very much discriminatory against the western provinces. The tariff structures that protect the industries of central Canada do no good to the resource-export industries of the western provinces.

So then, the question is: What is it that we want to achieve in Senate reform? I should like to suggest that we should develop some kind of system of electing members to the upper house, but not by direct vote of the kind that elects members to the House of Commons. Further, I suggest that the authority that is now vested in the Prime Minister to appoint Senators should be withdrawn. I also suggest that in order to balance off the criticism, that the House of Commons is controlled by the two largest provinces there be a redistribution of the number of members of the Senate who represent the different provinces. It should also be possible to replace members of the upper house from time to time prior to their becoming 75 years of age or so, though I realize there are some sitting members who are beyond that age yet are still extremely active and valued members of the upper house.

How do we achieve the aims that I have outlined? Firstly, I think it is possible to elect Senators indirectly; in other words, let elected people elect the Senators. In my view, the best elected body to elect members of the upper house is the legislature of each of the provinces. I think that an equal number of Senators should be elected from each province, and they should be elected by the legislature of the province. They should be elected for a term