

British North America Act

having the house leader in the Senate sit in the federal cabinet.

10. Minority groups have long been under-represented in the Senate. This should be corrected so that the multicultural character of the Canadian people will be reflected in the Senate.

I made that point in my first speech, Mr. Speaker. I advocate a Senate which would be composed of people from the various ethnic communities. I suggest certain communities are not sufficiently numerous in any given location to permit the election of a member to this House, and some cultural groups are not represented on public bodies for the same reason.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Penner): Order, please. I regret that I have to interrupt the hon. member but the time allotted to him in this debate has expired.

[Translation]

Mr. Jacques Olivier (Longueuil): Mr. Speaker, some hon. members began discussing the existence of the Senate in this House several years ago, when I was not even born, I think.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Yes.

Mr. Olivier: My colleague says yes.

After 30 years, we still do not know whether the Senate should be abolished, changed or maintained in its present form.

This afternoon, I made a point of studying some inquiries made by the Senate. A few solutions were put forward either in the final report presented by Senator Molgat or in the report of the hon. member for Windsor-Walkerville (Mr. MacGuigan) who was then and still is a member of this House. I also examined a brief tabled by a student, and I should like to quote from it as concern the consequences or the reasons for abolishing, maintaining or reforming the Senate.

● (1750)

May I say, Mr. Speaker, that as the member for Longueuil, I do not know whether we should abolish or retain it.

I listened with interest to the hon. member for Argen-teuil-Deux-Montagnes (Mr. Fox) who seemed in favour of abolishing the Senate. I also listened to another colleague opposite who is in favour of abolishing the Senate as well. Maybe you will find that I am slow in making up my mind, but they still have not sincerely convinced me of their opinions.

I would rather be in favour of some type of reform. Maybe the members of this House have not helped the cause of the Senate up to now by not trying to clarify its role. Some may have made fun of the Senate by saying: Listen, he is 50 or 70 years old, he is good for the Senate. We have sincerely tried to downgrade the role of some senators. I for one personally admire Senator Goldenberg who is an expert in labour relations and I believe that such a man is valuable as a counsellor who can pass judgment on pieces of legislation passed by the House of Commons.

I wonder, Mr. Speaker, if before coming to the conclusion that we are for or against the Senate, if we should not

[Mr. Blais.]

ask ourselves some questions, such as what will we do with present senators. There are some very valuable people there. It is easy, in North America, to say: We'll leave them their salary, and if they go away everything will be all right.

I think that for several senators, money is not the important thing. Their intellectual gifts are not to be found easily in Canada. They are advisors and some of their inquiry commissions have guided us and helped the House of Commons to make our decisions. These are arguments in their favour.

I should like to quote three remarks from a student, Mr. David MacLean, who appeared before a committee; he was asking himself some questions on the reasons for a debate on the Senate. I should like to quote parts of his report. First, the Senate has been progressively losing some of its prestige for several generations despite the presence of famous people in the Upper House. We make unkind remarks about some members in the House of Commons and our comments about the other place are perhaps a mere manifestation of jealousy.

Some members of parliament are jealous of others. I do not know if my colleague opposite is jealous because he was not appointed but, at least, he got a seat in this House. We are not empowered to appoint him but if he wishes so, I shall be pleased to support his nomination to the Senate. I think that this undue jealousy has played a great part in discrediting the contribution of senators. When I was a little boy playing in the street, I was already reading jokes about it in newspapers. Without having ever seen a senator, I imagined them walking with a stoop, leaning on their stick. They have been discredited one way or another by the media or the people in the House of Commons, whereas I think, Mr. Speaker, and I am sure that everybody here will agree, that the matter of age has nothing to do with the ability of people. We might give them more definite responsibilities. Some people have proposed that senators be elected. I have also tried to see how an elected Senate would operate in the system we now have in Canada. We have here several parties, fortunately or unfortunately. But just imagine, Mr. Speaker, what the situation would be if the House of Commons passed a legislation and said: We are really representing the views of the majority of Canadians and we have been elected to defend the rights of citizens.

If the Senate was elected by opposition members and was entirely against us, we would say: "We are the ones who represent the people." I think that we will always be witnesses to serious conflicts which might generate several constitutional difficulties. Even the citizen would raise serious questions, because views given in the House or in the Senate are sometimes based on political considerations. I do not say that those views are not good. They can be biased sometimes. I do not say that they are wrong, but they do not always give the full facts.

I think that if we tried to alter that role, we would be faced with more serious problems.

A number of persons have examined the role of the Senate and have said: "We will really try to renovate the whole system. We will try to inject new blood in the Senate."