

Senate Reform

have had it with them already. The people will put up with them for now, but in four years I am sure the Leader of our Party will be Prime Minister again.

To conclude, I want reform of the Senate as do Hon. Members across. Let us do it in an orderly way but let us not focus attention away from the trouble with the economy of the country.

Mr. Dan Heap (Spadina): Mr. Speaker, I rise to support the motion put by the Hon. Member for Lethbridge-Foothills (Mr. Thacker) that the House take note of the report of the Special Joint Committee on Senate Reform tabled in the House of Commons on Tuesday, January 31, 1984. I am prepared to support this motion, as I was prepared to support the motion put last week by another Government Member, because I think a discussion of the Senate report would open the way for an examination of issues that are deeper than those contained in the report. The report has never been discussed in the House and I think it would be a good thing to have the questions contained within that report raised in the House.

The actual proposals contained within the report are not realistic. If we were to be creating a new country, as happened with the United States a few centuries ago, there might be something to be said for having directly elected Senators from single-member constituencies distributed regionally, one-third from the Atlantic, one-third from the centre and one-third from the west, having them serve one term of nine years with staggered elections. If we were to create something in an abstract way, that might work. I am not sure that it would, but it would be well worth considering. However, we are not creating something abstract. We are dealing with a situation that has been muddled by 100 years of having a Senate that does not work for the majority of the people of Canada.

The feeling across the country toward the Senate is simply boredom. We do not need a second House. The provinces have given up on second Houses. Great Britain seems to be having less and less use for its House of Peers. However, Great Britain is stuck with its House of Peers because its peers are hereditary. The British Government had to do something with those peers so they put them in the House of Peers. Normally, not much attention is paid to them. I do not see any reason to continue the pretence that we in Canada have a reformed version of the House of Peers.

I think that having two Houses simply confuses the public and divides the jurisdictions. We now have constitutional problems between Ottawa and the provinces but to emphasize further a division between the Senate and the House of Commons only makes legislation more difficult to understand by the people on the street and in fact more difficult to understand by those who are making the legislation.

The argument that we need all wear two hats, one Canadian and one regional, is an old argument. In fact, I suppose it was the argument used, in those words or others, when the Senate was first created in the last century. It is a very abstract argument, and interestingly enough it is used principally by those who wish to maintain the status quo, by those who want to keep change limited and by those who do not want any real transfer of power from the wealthy to the less wealthy.

The Senate has been a very good bulwark of the wealthy. Whenever a Parliament, under pressure from the public, puts through legislation to limit the powers of the banks, by the time the Bill gets through the Senate the Senate has enlarged the powers of the banks. The Senate has many ties with the banks. Not all Senators do; there are a few who do not have ties with the banks. However, the job Senators do on banking legislation is certainly very valuable to the banks and very harmful to the farmers, working people and small-businessmen who must suffer the results of lopsided legislation in favour of the banks.

The argument that national unity is protected by a second House has nothing to recommend it. It has never been demonstrated that it would in fact promote national unity. What it does is perpetuate a system in which issues of real importance to working people and farmers are befuddled either by appeals to solve this mysterious problem between the French and the English or between the English and people of other languages or the mysterious problem of the regions. Problems do not get solved by having a Senate; they simply become more mystifying.

This motion calls upon us to examine the Senate Reform report, and I would support the motion for that purpose. However, when we do examine the report, I do not really think we will find its recommendations workable. I think it is necessary to go through those recommendations, find that they are not workable, and then deal with what has for half a century been the only clearly workable solution to the Senate problem, and that is abolition.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bernard Valcourt (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of State for Science and Technology): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased today to speak to the motion now under consideration by the House with respect to the report of the Special Joint Committee on Senate Reform. One thing that struck me is that this issue was not even on our agenda during the last election campaign when Canadians gave massive support to our Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) and our party. Earlier today, the Hon. Member for Glengarry-Prescott-Russell (Mr. Boudria) referred to the 338 promises made by our party, yet none had anything to do with the Senate. On the contrary, we promised Canadians new leadership and that is why, on November 8, the Minister of Finance (Mr. Wilson) set a new course for Canada. There was nothing about Senate reform on our agenda because we thought it was a lot more important to