

During the last few weeks I have had the privilege on at least two occasions of participating in debates on the Senate with prominent members of the other place—these debates took place on radio and television—so I think I am reasonably familiar with the kinds of arguments that are advanced by those who really believe in the Senate. I cannot imagine any persons who believe in the Senate more than those who are in it, except some of those around here who would like to get in it.

● (1702)

An hon. Member: Does that include you?

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): In case that question is on the record, I am sure my hon. friend knows that the answer is absolutely no. The arguments that have been advanced in the debates in which I have participated lately centre mainly around the proposition that the men and women in the Senate are good persons, that they are hardworking and that they do a good job for the people of Canada. Mr. Speaker, that argument completely misses the point. I readily concede that there are good Canadians in the other place. I readily concede that somewhere between 20 and 25 of them work hard at the job, but I think that is about all. The rest are just there when they need to be. The number who really work at the job is probably not greater than 20 or 25.

I readily concede that some of the reports that committees of the other place have prepared have been good reports. They have been very useful. But, Mr. Speaker, those arguments completely miss the point that in the Senate we have a House of Parliament made up of persons not elected at all who get there solely by being appointed or nominated by the Prime Minister—persons who are responsible back to no one, not even to the Prime Minister who nominated them and yet who constitutionally have all the authority that we, the elected people, have here in this House of Commons.

Sir, we can make mistakes, and this House certainly does make mistakes—many of them when we have Liberals in power. But we have to go back to the people of Canada every three, four or five years, for it is to them that we are responsible. That other House never has to go back to anyone. As I say, even if a lady or gentleman has been appointed to the Senate on the nomination of the Prime Minister, he or she is not even responsible back to the Prime Minister at all. That is why I think we should take a whole new look at the make-up of parliament.

Maybe there was something to the idea 110 years ago that democracy could not be fully trusted; that you had to have some people around to check on what the elected people were doing. Surely, in 110 years we have grown up and reached the point where we realize that democracy calls for the laws of this country to be made by elected persons and not by appointed persons. Maybe in a moment or two I will define them a little more precisely than just by calling them "persons." It is for these reasons, namely, that in 1977 as opposed to 1867 surely we believe in democracy, that I think we ought to have a

Abolition of Senate

parliament consisting only of those elected by the people of Canada.

I could point out that in the early years of the history of this country a number of provinces had an upper House. My own province of Manitoba had one, Nova Scotia had one and so did several other provinces. They got rid of them one by one, and the last province to get rid of an upper House was Quebec. I do not see the government of any of those provinces suffering because they have legislatures consisting of only one House. I therefore contend that we should take the same step and go all out for the democratic principle of the people being represented and governed only by those whom they have actually elected. I regard there being a non-elected part of this institution as a blot on the democratic idea. I regard it as utterly stupid for us to have persons in another place not elected who have the same constitutional authority we have in this House of Commons.

This is brought out very forcibly—and quite often, too—when a person who has been a member of this House as run for re-election and has been defeated. In being defeated he has been told by the people of the constituency or province where he lives that those people do not want him in parliament. A few months later in many cases that individual, if he is a Liberal, is appointed to the Senate and gets into the very parliament where the people of his constituency and province said they did not want him. As I said, it is not only undemocratic; I think it makes us, in so far as we believe in democracy, look utterly stupid. I hope we will take a new look at the whole proposition.

It is argued, of course, that in the other place they do some good committee work. That is true. I could name some of the reports such as that on land use, poverty, aging, and so on, that have been exceptionally good. That is no reason for us keeping on a very high payroll 104 persons so that a dozen or 15 of them can do certain committee work. That committee work could be done by royal commissions, academic people, persons pulled in from the universities, the labour movement or farm movements for a specific job. But keeping 104 people on a very high payroll, with expense allowances and staff running into several millions of dollars per year spent on the other place, I think makes no sense at all.

It is argued that there are times in the other place that they find things wrong with some of the bills that we pass and send them back to us. Many of those things that are found wrong are found by the officials in the departments and are simply corrected over there, although some time ago when their Honours amended a bill in something over 100 clauses and felt very proud of what they had done, the bill came back here and the government did not reintroduce it. That is what the government thinks of the fine tooth-comb job the Senate did on that particular bill. Even if what they did was good, to give them the right to set aside what we decide in this House of Commons, where we are responsible to the people, is in my view completely contrary to the principles of democracy. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, I make the plea again, and I have been making it for a long time, that we take a serious look at