

*Senate Reform*

most significant and substantive regional concerns, then it will itself fail. It will not be very long in the position of earning a majority in this country.

The panacea of an elected Senate is just that. It does not deal adequately with the problems it is supposed to deal with, namely those of regional concerns. One is therefore led to ask, as did my hon. friend from Niagara Falls: Why a Senate at all?

A very important development has taken place in the last two or three years so far as the House of Commons is concerned. That development is the committee system. A lot of the talk about having an elected second Chamber came about because it was found that the House of Commons did not sufficiently address the regional and other concerns of this country, and the committees of this House were simply pale reflections of the House itself. They did not have very much clout or very great concern for the issues being debated in the House. Therefore, it was thought that an elected second Chamber would do some of the work which the House of Commons is not doing. I think it was that more than the so-called sober second thought which gave some impetus, until the last two or three years, to the idea of having an elected Senate or having a second Chamber at all.

● (1720)

However, because we have seen significant improvement in the role of the committees of this Chamber in addressing major issues; in quite drastically, in some cases, changing government measures, often by all-Party agreement; in taking initiative in legislative and policy-making fields which committees had not taken until the reforms were implemented; in giving expression to regional concerns; and in getting more clout, we have, in fact, developed our chamber of sober second thought within the committee system of the House of Commons. It seems to me that that gives added argument to those of us who believe that a second chamber is obsolete and unnecessary, whether elected or appointed.

As I mentioned, it should be primarily the various political parties which address regional and other issues. It should be incumbent upon parties to recognize the diversity within Canada and to shape policies which will meet the gravest concerns in the regions of the country as far as federal jurisdiction is concerned. Next to the parties, it should be the role of Cabinet to bring regional problems to the attention of others in Cabinet. It is also the role of federal-provincial conferences to do so and also the role of the House and, in particular, committees of the House.

We do have, therefore, the vehicle—the Party system, the parliamentary system with a strong House of Commons, the growing strength of the committees of the House of Commons, the Cabinet, and federal-provincial conferences. We have a number of instruments nowadays to attempt to understand and meet the concerns of all the regions of the country. We do not need a second chamber to do that for us.

In British Columbia I find that there is not all that much excitement about having a second chamber. Indeed, there is very little. There is not a great interest in having an elected second chamber nor in having an appointed second chamber, although in some ways that is found to be preferable if we must have a second chamber at all. I have always found that British Columbia wants a strong voice in Cabinet, a strong voice in committees, a strong voice at federal-provincial conferences, and a strong voice in the bureaucracy and the boards and commissions of the country.

We often find that a board or commission such as the CRTC or the Canadian Transport Commission will go for years at a time without any voice from British Columbia. A lot of important decisions are made there. This goes back to W.A.C. Bennett's arguments of many years ago in which I think there is a lot of merit. B.C. has been overlooked often simply because it does not have a voice in the various boards and commissions which have become so important in our central government.

Neither does British Columbia have an adequate voice in the bureaucracy. People come from British Columbia and serve in the public service, but Ottawa has a terrible tendency to socialize people into an Ottawa perspective. We must have changes made in the bureaucracy itself and have more flow from the centre to the regions and back. That would be an answer to some of our regional discontent.

To conclude, Mr. Speaker, there are ways which exist now in Cabinet, in Parties, and in the committee system of the House to address regional interests. There can be new ways to address regional consent. We can strengthen their representation on boards and commissions, make the bureaucracy itself more sensitive to the regions, and inform the decision-makers and those just below them of what is happening in the country. If I may speak for a lot of British Columbians, those answers are far more desirable than the motion before us today or any other motion suggesting that an elected Senate is somehow going to meet the real problems of the regions of the country.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Claude Lanthier (LaSalle):** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to rise on such an important subject.

As my colleague mentioned her regional concerns, it is my pleasure today to express our regional concerns in Quebec by informing you of a resolution that was passed unanimously yesterday at an important meeting of the Progressive Conservative Party of Quebec where it was proposed that the abolition of the Senate—

**Mr. Boudria:** Shame!

**Mr. Lanthier:** Shouts of “shame” are now coming from the Liberal side, where “red” protectors are watching... The destiny of the Liberal Party is being looked after way ahead of time.