

**Hon. Duff Roblin (Leader of the Government):** My honourable friend raises a fascinating point. I must say that when anyone starts off a question with very kind remarks of the type he addressed to me, I immediately become a little suspicious that something will follow which will cause me a little difficulty.

I have to admit that I have been and am still of the mind with respect to the constitutional position of the Senate that I espoused some time ago. However, I must also admit that that happens to be my opinion, formed as a private member of the Senate and therefore one which, in the present circumstances, has to be adjusted to the policy of the government, and so I accept that limitation on my own freedom of expression.

I am not sure whether I would dare to offer myself as a candidate for the franchise of my colleagues on the government side for this post.

**Senator Thompson:** My question merely referred to your caucus. I did not extend it to the whole Senate, although that is a challenging issue.

**Senator Roblin:** That would be even more fun, if I had to appeal for the support of senators regardless of where they sit, but the fact is that I am constrained to operate under the Constitution as it now exists, and that accounts for my being in this present position.

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### SPEECH FROM THE THRONE

#### MOTION FOR ADDRESS IN REPLY—DEBATE CONTINUED

##### On the Order:

Resuming the debate on the motion of the Honourable Senator Macquarrie, seconded by the Honourable Senator Tremblay, for an Address to Her Excellency the Governor General in reply to Her Speech at the opening of the session.—(*Honourable Senator MacEachen P.C.*)

**Hon. Allan J. MacEachen (Leader of the Opposition):** Honourable senators, this is the first opportunity I have had to congratulate Senator Charbonneau on becoming the presiding officer of the Senate. In looking through the *Debates of the Senate* I note that when a predecessor of mine in this particular post spoke in a similar debate on October 11, 1979, he took occasion to welcome a new senator and to congratulate him on his appointment. Of course, that was Senator Perrault extending a welcome to Senator Charbonneau. At that time, my colleague pointed out the very great qualifications of Senator Charbonneau and the contribution that he would inevitably make to the work of the Senate. That, of course, must have been fully justified by his work since then, for we see the recognition given to that work by his selection as the presiding officer. I certainly want to congratulate him and assure him of my full co-operation in carrying out his responsibilities.

I wish also, honourable senators, to congratulate the mover and seconder on their speeches of last Tuesday. They launched our debates very well indeed. I thank them for the good wishes which they extended to me as I begin my tenure as a senator

and as Leader of the Opposition. There is much I have to learn about the ways of this legislative body. In fact, the learning process is well begun.

It is evident that the environment in which the Thirty-third Parliament will operate is drastically different from that of its predecessor. The election gave us a new Prime Minister and a government with a huge majority in the House of Commons—possibly an unmanageable majority. Nevertheless, the win was decisive and impressive in every region and province, and certainly I would not deny for a moment the evident joy on the faces of Senators Macquarrie and Tremblay as they dwelt upon the significance of that victory.

Indeed, Senator Macquarrie volunteered some friendly advice. He warned us against becoming disconsolate in our role as opposition members, and he offered to provide whatever counsel had carried him through all those years which he spent in opposition. Let me assure honourable senators that we on this side will not become disconsolate. We understand the reluctance which our friends opposite have shown in the past in remaining in office for any significant length of time.

I want to refer also to comments which Senator Macquarrie made about the Senate. He told us that the Senate was an integral part of our structure. One wonders whether the role of the Senate has been altered by the current political context. As far as I am concerned, the constitutional position and political stature of the Senate remains unchanged. No member of this chamber would suggest that the Senate should usurp the leading role of the House of Commons, or systematically obstruct the will of the majority in the elected body of Parliament. Certainly I do not approach my role as Leader of the Opposition from that vantage point.

However, as Senator Macquarrie also pointed out, there is an important question of mathematical strength. We do have numbers on this side; we have a strong Liberal majority. That Liberal majority has an enormous responsibility to exercise its role without disregarding the will of the people as reflected in the membership of the House of Commons, but the government minority in this chamber has an equal responsibility to take account of the realities of its minority position.

Every legislative assembly in our system operates on the majority principle, and the Senate is no exception. The majority will decide; the majority will prevail. That, of course, is not a calamity; it is not a danger. I certainly have had a great deal of experience operating as a member of governments which survived for years in a minority situation in the House of Commons. However, the management of such a situation requires a firm grasp and awareness of the realities. In 1979, as honourable senators will recall, the government decided to behave as if it had a majority in the House of Commons. Of course, that was an unhappy experience. I am sure that the Leader of the Government in the Senate will show a more subtle approach to the majority in this chamber.

● (1500)

Of course, the difference between us is not just in numbers. We differ in political philosophy. We are Liberals on this side