

## CHAPTER 6

### An Elected Senate: The Committee's Proposal

---

Having concluded that an elected Senate would best meet our objectives for reform, the Committee faced a wide range of choices on questions such as the method of election, the distribution of seats among the provinces, and the powers of the Senate. The choices ranged from a Senate with powers equal to those of the House of Commons and with an equal number of seats for each province, to an advisory rather than a legislative body, with a distribution of seats proportionate to the population of each province.

We tried to strike a balance between these extremes. We propose that, in due course, senators be elected for non-renewable nine-year terms by plurality vote in single-member constituencies, in triennial elections separate from Commons elections, and that the Senate have a suspensive veto of 120 sitting days over most bills. The representation of the less populous provinces and of the territories would be increased, bringing the number of seats in the Senate to 144. Legislation of linguistic significance would require a double majority vote. Before describing our proposals in detail, we shall say something about the principles that guided our choice.

It is generally acknowledged that a parliamentary system based on ministerial responsibility has served Canada well and should not be endangered. Such a system clearly works better if the government is responsible to only one house. If the government were responsible to two houses, one of which it did not control, the operations of government could well be paralysed. We have sought to avoid this at all costs. We have attempted therefore to ensure that an elected Senate, while enjoying substantial powers, will not be in a position to contest the ultimate supremacy of the House of Commons.

Another of our major concerns was to ensure that senators have the desired measure of independence. If they are perceived as purely partisan, their credibility as people speaking on behalf of regional interests will be diminished, and we will have failed to meet one of the goals of reform. In deciding on a method of election, on the powers of the Senate, and on the length of a senator's term, we have made choices that should help give senators a certain autonomy.