

Senate Reform

Perhaps this sounds like a simplistic way of looking at the situation, but I have given it quite a bit of thought. I have sat in the Ontario legislature and I am now a Member of the House. I also had the pleasure of serving three terms at the municipal level. I have served in all three levels of government and I have looked at the situation from all three perspectives. I feel this would be a form of compromise to some of the suggestions which have been raised previously.

[Translation]

Mr. Speaker, a Member of this House mentioned earlier there had been a proposal to the effect that the Senate should have the same number of seats, or rather, the same number of senators for each province, since that situation exists in the United States. However, I feel this would be totally unacceptable under the system of government we have here in Canada.

It is quite obvious that Quebec, for instance, would refuse outright to be represented on the same basis as, let us say, Prince Edward Island or New Brunswick or other provinces. And I think Quebecers would have every reason to consider such a formula unacceptable.

As a Franco-Ontarian, living in Ontario but of Quebec origin, I must say, Mr. Speaker, that I could not go along with that kind of system either, because we must remember the history of this country and not just refer to what is going on today. We all know that this country was founded as a result of the union of the United Provinces of Canada—Canada East and Canada West—with the Maritimes Provinces, and that when at the time of Confederation in 1867, under the British North America Act, Canada was united, this was done bearing in mind the differing views in the various regions and ensuring that each region was equally represented. The three regions at the time the Maritimes, Canada East or Quebec and Canada West or Ontario, were equally represented in the new Senate. This was to ensure, since representation in the House of Commons was based on population, that if the population in provinces other than Quebec, for instance, were to increase, Quebec would not lose entirely its position of importance in our Canadian federation. That is why a formula according to which Quebec would have one-tenth or one-eleventh, if we count the territories, of the total number of senators representing our country, would be totally unacceptable. It is important that Quebec should have more than just one-tenth or one-eleventh of our country's representation in the Senate.

Mr. Speaker, I think it would not make any sense at all to have Quebec represented by the same number of senators as the other provinces. Quebec deserves this special status.

[English]

I just want to draw to the attention of the House that in the last few weeks the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) and perhaps some Government Members, although I am sure it would not be the ones who raised resolutions in the last few weeks, were attempting to smoke-screen other very important and

pressing problems in the country by entertaining debate and suggesting that the Senate should be abolished. The other day in the House the Prime Minister tried the smoke and mirror act. He tried to tell us that if the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Turner) gave instant, unanimous approval to a proposition to abolish the Senate, he would do it right then. That suggestion was totally ridiculous. That power does not lie with the Prime Minister, much less with the Leader of the Opposition. Since when does Government legislation start with a Bill which needs the assent of the Leader of the Opposition? That is totally unthinkable. Of course, it was not taken seriously by anyone, including members of the press.

It should be remembered that the country is in serious financial difficulty and that the Government made quite a few promises during the last election campaign. I have spent some time in the House reminding the Government of the 338 promises it made to the Canadian people. These problems and the unfulfilled commitments with which the Government of the day is stuck create a difficult situation. The Government is attempting to have debates on issues which focus attention away from youth unemployment, from its past attempts to abolish the universality of social programs and from its other failures in the last few months. This has not worked and it will not work. Only last week the Government House Leader said to the press: "You can't abolish the Senate without unanimity, the reason being that it affects the formula under the Constitution". If we need the unanimous accord of all 10 provinces and both Houses of Parliament, why is the Prime Minister, the Leader of our Government, suggesting that the only thing needed to abolish the Senate, which he did not intend to do to start with, was to move some sort of resolution and have the approval of the Leader of the Opposition?

Obviously the Leader of the Opposition saw through that proposal very quickly. Our Leader understands these issues more than the present Prime Minister, who does not have much experience in the House. Our Leader understood that we could not get away with such a resolution. Of course, the Leader of our Party was Minister of Justice for many years and has been apprised of constitutional issues. Only you, Mr. Speaker, with your objective and non-partisan position, would understand and agree with me, I am sure.

• (1650)

An Hon. Member: He wasn't Prime Minister for long.

Mr. Boudria: An Hon. Member has said that the Leader of my Party was not Prime Minister for long. He will be Prime Minister yet and he will be Prime Minister for a far longer period of time than the Hon. Member's Leader will be Prime Minister.

An Hon. Member: Keep hoping.

Mr. Boudria: He says that we should keep hoping. We know that the honeymoon with the Tories is over. If anything, it lasted too long. The people of the country had enough of the last Tory Government after nine months. It is now seven months that we have had this bunch in power and the people