

[Translation]

Hon. Arthur Tremblay: Honourable senators, I wish to direct a question to Senator Godfrey on the third point which he has raised.

I believe this third point referred to what I would call the "freedom" of the Senate committees to deal, on their own initiative, with the issues which come under their respective areas of responsibility as defined in our rules.

So he is attacking the section of our rules which defines the areas of responsibility of the various committees under the heading "Committees".

As Chairman of the Senate committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology, I will refer to the section dealing with this committee, on page 24 of our rules. If I understood well Senator Godfrey's intention, he is calling into question paragraph 1) of this section, which reads as follows:

Le comité sénatorial des affaires sociales, des sciences et de la technologie, . . . auquel sont déferés . . .

In English, the wording is even stronger.

To which shall be referred, if there is an order of the Senate to that effect, bills, messages, petitions, inquiries, papers and other matters relating to Social Affairs, Science, and Technology generally, including:

Well, the list of matters is fairly long, it includes Veterans Affairs, Indian and Inuit Affairs, etc.

At the present time, in view of this text, the committee studies a subject only if it is referred to it, if there is an order of the Senate to that effect.

In Senator Godfrey's proposal, the committee would be under no obligation to deal with all of that. It would only have the "freedom" to do so.

[English]

There was only freedom to study any one of those subjects, but there was no obligation on the part of the committee; whereas there is an obligation on the part of the committee to study any question relating to those subject matters which are referred by the Senate. That is the real meaning of the proposal. The proposal is not that the committee would have any obligation to cover all those fields. It has the freedom to study any one of those subjects if it feels that there is some justification for such a study. That is the meaning of the proposal.

Senator Godfrey: The meaning of the proposal was that it was for the committee to decide, and I emphasize "the committee." The way it works now, it is usually the chairman, in cahoots with the powers-that-be, who decides what the committee should do, arranges to get a reference, and so on.

I believe the committee itself should have the power, on its own initiative, to start an investigative inquiry. The Senate should, of course, reserve the power to order the committee to commence an investigative study. We have heard about that in connection with the Canadian Commercial Bank. There are two ways of handling that: by a pre-study of any bill that is introduced, or by specific reference.

[Senator Godfrey.]

I would say that giving the committee more power would include having the members of the committee elect their own chairman, and not have the chairman selected by the powers-that-be. Members of the committee know who is the most attentive, the most knowledgeable and who would make the best chairman, and, as far as I am concerned, they are the ones who should be choosing the chairman. I know that we go through the motions of voting for a chairman, but everyone knows that the fix is in.

Senator Tremblay: The committee, such as the one I have just mentioned, would have the freedom and the power to study anything relating to those subject matters. When I look at that list, I have the feeling that that freedom, or that power, does not mean anything if, at the same time, a committee has not the means of making a sound study of those subjects—which brings us to the question of the budget and other related matters. To have the committee merely talk about those subjects, as it would be free to do, according to the honourable senator's proposal, would not mean very much if the means were not, at the same time, given to the committee. If that is the case, I suppose the committee should have to come to the Senate and ask for the means—

Senator Frith: Hear, hear.

Senator Tremblay: —to go far enough in its study; otherwise it would simply be a question of talking for talking's sake.

Senator Godfrey: We have just had a perfect example of how well our rules work, because the senator did not really ask a question then. Of course, there are certain times when a committee could look at something without its costing a cent. At one time we considered a change in the rules, which I blocked, because I did not consider that it went nearly far enough. I believe we discussed the point that if a farm organization arrived in Ottawa and the Agriculture Committee wanted to hear them, then it had the right to go ahead and hear them. It was not going to cost the committee anything. However, I blocked it because I did not think it went far enough. I thought that the matter should have been referred to the Committee on Standing Rules and Orders. I thought the chairman of the committee should consider it.

If it is going to cost anything, of course, the matter should then go before the Standing Committee on Internal Economy, Budgets and Administration—no one is arguing that point—so that there is some curb at that point.

But if a committee comes up with a good proposal, I am sure there would be no difficulty with the Internal Economy Committee. But certainly they would have to have any budget approved by that committee. I believe that the way it is proposed is the way it works in the House of Commons.

Hon. Douglas D. Everett: Honourable senators, I rise to support the proposition put forward by Senator Godfrey. Indeed, he is right that in the Standing Senate Committee on National Finance we did establish the concept of having a fairly wide ambit of freedom to examine anything we wanted to in relation to government spending or to government economic policy. That arose by virtue of the fact that the spending