

Government Orders

ministership in the Senate rather than in the Commons. Of course in Britain it was quite common at that time for a lord to be prime minister as well as a member of the Commons.

• (1100)

Diversity and important political figures were present in the Senate at that time, right from the beginning. The principal Liberal leader of the day, George Brown, was appointed to the Senate after he failed to secure representation in the election of 1867.

Things have changed. Today we have a fuller and more democratic theory of government than we did in the past and effectiveness of the Senate, as with any other political body, requires that it be elected. This is not just a phenomenon of the Senate. I would point out that the House of Commons, as constituted in 1867, would not be remotely considered democratic today. We will talk on another occasion whether this House of Commons is effective and truly democratic. I will leave that to a later date.

In 1867 members of the House of Commons were elected but only by property holders, only by those over 21 years of age, only by those who were male. In some provinces of Canada, in some parts of Canada and at certain times in our history, elections were restricted by racial considerations.

We would never for a minute suggest that would be an appropriate way of choosing the House of Commons today or an appropriate composition for the House of Commons and so we have modernized it. We have modernized the House of Commons but not the Senate. Why have we done that? I will put it in very simple and blunt terms. We have modernized the House of Commons because it is the power centre of Ontario and Quebec. We have not modernized the Senate because it was intended to be the voice for the other regions that have not fared as well in Confederation.

At the centre of this argument I would only point out to my constituents and to those who are watching today the Ontario and Quebec alliance that will shove through this particular constitutional amendment.

It is interesting to see in this century what has happened to upper houses, not just in the anglo-American world but across the world. Those houses that were built mainly or almost exclusively on pre-democratic theory have atrophied or disappeared. I think, for example, of the House of Lords in Britain which still exists today but which has largely been stripped of its powers and exists, I suggest, as a relic of another era.

In the case of our provinces, the legislative councils, the upper houses of the provinces, which really had an exclusive pre-democratic function, have entirely disappeared, the last being in Quebec in 1968.

However, those houses built on the concept of regional representation within a federation have remained and by and large flourished as legislative chambers. The Senates in the United States and Australia have become elected bodies and have become very powerful.

In the case of the Senate in the United States we know what happened there. The United States Senate was not originally elected but rather chosen by state legislatures. That manner of selection was gradually broadened and eventually some states began to have popular elections for their senators even before the constitutional amendment proclaiming such a thing had come to pass. The Senate was largely elected by the time that happened.

In Canada the Senate has survived but its modernization has been slow. We have attempted to move along with the development of the theories but at a very slow pace. We have made no attempts in our history to increase the property requirement that defined the early Senate. It still exists on paper but \$4,000 real property is now a modest requirement for many people.

In 1915 we moved to recognize the west. After the west had been in Confederation for about 45 years we decided it was time to formally recognize the presence of the west in the regional chamber. Before that there had been a few senators appointed from various provinces now and again. In 1915 a fourth Senate division was created to recognize western Canada. Since then other representatives have been added in Newfoundland and in the territories.

• (1105)

In 1965 we took the step of ending lifetime Senate appointments. We know there are very few lifers but this has been one particular reform.

In 1989-90 we had the election of the first senator, the late Senator Stan Waters, a member of my party, a good personal friend of mine and a ground breaker, as we all had hoped. Just as in the United States, when Senator Waters was elected there were denials from those who opposed Senate election and regional representation, denials that this could happen, that it could not happen, that it was unconstitutional, that it was illegal. There were a million impediments.

It is amazing how things can happen in this country, in any country, in any political system when people want them to happen. It is amazing how many excuses and roadblocks can be created when there is a desire to thwart the principle underlying the action.

Today the minister, to my surprise, spoke about praising the P.E.I. bridge because it had been approved in a referendum. How many times since this House has reconvened have we heard the government speak against referendums and the danger presented in referendums? When the government has an agenda it wants to see go through, a referendum is possible.