

I would appreciate hearing the views of the hon. member for Vancouver Quadra.

Mr. McWhinney: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his question and I will make the following comment.

I regret that it is almost impossible to change the Constitution directly with a law, as far as the Senate is concerned. If it is possible, we can consider it, but it will take the senators' consent.

But without changing the role of Parliament, of the elected House, I do not think that we can simply abolish the Senate. Legislative committees absolutely must have an increased role and the House must have a much more sophisticated system than the Constitutional checks and balances than what we now have.

As for Senate reform, in the 1980s, we considered the possibility of a sort of Constitutional counterweight, a body that would oversee executive decisions, confirm appointments, review treaties and international agreements, things like that. We are faced with this dilemma that it is almost impossible to abolish the Senate without its consent, except as far as details and particular powers of the Senate are concerned.

I agree that we must work with the Senate and try to obtain their co-operation. If not, I am quite prepared to accept an increased role for legislative committees and even to consider the possibility of an advisory opinion from the Supreme Court of Canada.

Mr. Don Boudria (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell): Mr. Speaker, I too listened closely and with a great deal of interest to the speech given by our colleague from Vancouver Quadra who is an expert in constitutional matters.

• (1600)

The Senate is, by definition, the chamber which represents the interests of the provinces. Now is not the time to debate how well it actually does this job, but the fact remains that this is one of its many duties, namely to counterbalance the representation by population in the House of Commons.

In light of these considerations, does the hon. member not consider it highly unusual, as I do, that a party which claims to have provincial interests at heart all of a sudden attempts in this federal chamber to abolish a mechanism which belongs to the provinces, without even bothering to consult them, and what is more, attempts to do so by cutting this institution's budget? Does he not find this the least bit odd? I do. The member opposite claims that Canadians do not really care all that much about the Senate.

Supply

If my colleague from Vancouver Quadra will recall the Charlottetown constitutional debate, he will remember that the Senate did indeed matter. Once the debate had begun, the people argued over whether their province should have one more senator, or one less. Would he not agree that the Senate seemed to matter then, that Canadians should at the very least be consulted before the Senate is abolished and that such a decision should not be made if that is not what the provinces or the Canadian people want?

Mr. McWhinney: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for his question. It is important to recognize the distinction made by the renowned Austro-Hungarian jurist by the name of Ehrlich between written law and the actual practice of law. I cannot consider the Senate as it is today as representing the provinces, unless major changes are made to its make-up. You cannot really say that the Senate represents the provinces.

Under these circumstances, it is very important to change the representation system applied to the Senate so that it can play the role it was originally set up for, but which does not reflect the social reality in Canada any more. That is why I would be tempted to make these changes, even though I am not very optimistic.

Mr. Gaston Leroux (Richmond—Wolfe): Mr. Speaker, as the member for Richmond—Wolfe and on behalf of my colleagues from the Bloc Québécois and of all the people we represent in the House of Commons, I will speak to the notice I gave to this House objecting, on behalf of the Official Opposition, to the vote in the amount of \$26,952,000 under the heading Parliament—The Senate.

The Bloc has always spoken out against the existence of a Senate, and I would like to demonstrate that this institution is, in our opinion, as archaic as it is useless. This institution is nothing more than an excuse for the government to reward its friends, be they Liberal or Tory, who will then work—in true partisan fashion—for the government or for the interests they represent. Several of my colleagues will prove it in several ways during this debate.

I listened to the speech made by the hon. member for Vancouver Quadra and I will go over the issues he dealt with. He will probably not like my arguments. I note at the outset that the hon. member for Vancouver Quadra must be feeling lonely because, first of all, he looked at the issue of maintaining the votes through the objective of revamping and improving the Senate. He must be feeling lonely because, first, his own leader does not want to address in any way the constitutional issue and, second, the Senate itself would have to scuttle its own ship.