

In light of the history of this particular resolution, the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) in his bluffing style challenged me to support an immediate move for the abolition of the Senate. Frankly, I am surprised, since the hon. gentleman commented on my occasional absences from the House, that the Prime Minister is not here himself to deal with this particular situation because it goes right to the fundamental aspects of our Constitution. The Senate, as the Hon. Minister pointed out, represented the territorial impulse in our Confederation. That was the reason the smaller provinces agreed to join with Upper Canada, now Ontario, in our Confederation. This is not an ordinary resolution. It is not a Bill. It goes right to the fundamental constitutional structure of the country. The Prime Minister was the man who raised this in the public consciousness. With the greatest respect to my friend, he should have been the one to bring this before the House of Commons, dealing as it does so fundamentally with the way our country is put together.

This resolution is nothing more or less than an indirect attempt to abolish the Senate of Canada. If that be so, the NDP should have no difficulty in supporting it. However, it is also a resolution which has very serious implications for the constitutional responsibilities of this House, and I will describe why. It also relates to the rights, responsibilities and duties of all its Members. We have read the resolution very carefully, and we believe that this House ought to be apprised of some of its implications, and indeed the country should as well.

Effectively, this resolution is really an attempt to reduce the Parliament of Canada to a one House Parliament, so it restricts any role that the Senate might play. This item is on the Government's agenda at a time when the attention of the Government, and indeed the focus of both Houses of Parliament, should be on the economy, on jobs, on the plight of pensioners and on the problems of young people, particularly those between the ages of 15 and 24, who are trying to find jobs. I interpret the coincidence of the debate of this issue on this Friday as a diversionary tactic, hoping to catch the attention of the newspapers and other media over the weekend and to distract the attention of the people of Canada from the atrocious Budget which the Government brought down a few days ago. It is an atrocious Budget which is unfair in that it taxes the average Canadian family about \$500 and allows the wealthy investor to receive a lifetime cash bonus of \$125,000. It is sneaky because it taxes by way of deindexing our tax system and it contains hidden, secret tax increases of 3 per cent per year, per year, per year, hitting our old age pensioners. It is a Budget which does not provide for jobs or growth. On the basis of the best advice we can receive, it will cost between 100,000 and 125,000 jobs in the next two years. It is a diversionary tactic and a desperate attempt by the House Leader and the Prime Minister, using the Minister of Justice as a decoy, to distract—

An Hon. Member: A decoy?

Mr. Turner (Vancouver Quadra): He is a sitting duck, I will put it that way.

The Constitution

An Hon. Member: He is a big decoy.

Mr. Crosbie: Come and get me.

Mr. Nunziata: Come outside, John.

● (1420)

Mr. Turner (Vancouver Quadra): We might have the rat pack on this side; you have the quack, quack over there.

This is a diversionary tactic, a desperate attempt by the Government to distract the airwaves and the news over the weekend. The Government, with its overwhelming majority in this Chamber, is more concerned with settling old scores, reigniting old feuds and avenging old vendettas, particularly in the Atlantic Provinces, if one listened to the Minister this morning.

I wish to say at the outset that the Liberal Party has always been, remains and will remain in favour of Senate reform. At the 1982 policy convention of the Party I have the honour to lead, a resolution was passed calling on the Government of the day to examine the possibility of an elected Senate and of increasing the role of regional representation therein. That is the position we are taking with respect to this resolution.

In order to obtain speedy provincial agreement, it is stated in the preamble to the resolution before us that the Government is holding out the promise of a full constitutional conference on the Senate by 1987. Although outside the House, the Prime Minister said that 1987 might not be the date, and that it might be 1988 or 1989, one wonders how firm his commitment is. In the resolution itself there are no real proposals for reform, either with respect to the method of appointment, the term of office, the role or the regional balance of Senators. There have been no pronouncements by the Government with respect to where it stands in regard to Senate reform so as to give the provinces and the country an indication of where the Government intends to take us. There is no White Paper, no discussion paper, no Grey Paper. There is no basis upon which this debate can be conducted.

Until this morning, the Minister of Justice made no speeches with respect to the subject. Certainly, the Prime Minister has not clarified his ideas to the country. There have been no speeches stating what the reform might be or in which way the Government may be contemplating it. This resolution gives us no guidelines as to what further reforms are contemplated.

As the Minister has indicated, the resolution borrows some of the language of the Parliament Act of the United Kingdom which was passed in Westminster in the year 1911. That Act applies the same 30-day limit on the House of Lords' consideration of money Bills as the Minister would like to put on the consideration of money Bills by the Senate. For the enlightenment of the provincial Premiers, who seem acquiescent with respect to the resolution in exchange for a full conference on constitutional reform of the Senate later, for as yet unspecified reforms, the Government has not revealed its hand. Certainly, the Minister did not address the subject this morning. I wish to