

• (2120)

I think you will have to excuse me when I say that my colleagues and I in this party instinctively sympathize with the underdog. I realize it stretches the imagination to consider the Senate as an underdog, but when I look at this motion and think how ungrateful it is in respect of friends and colleagues, I feel I must say something in an effort to put the matter in perspective. It might be misunderstood if I were simply to abstain or did not vote. Therefore, I prefer to offer an explanation, as a new member of this House who is anxious to learn and avoid making errors.

In fact, those from the other place who served on that committee did a good job. Senator Croll, the chairman of the committee, was far more to the left and far more eager to get things going than, I regret to say, were members of the Conservative party. Maybe they were shocked by the situation and wished to redress the balance. But in the final analysis, the reason the Department of Consumer and Corporate Affairs was established was that the vote of one Senator swung it that way. I do not know whether that is a fair commentary on the Senate or on the Conservative party, but nevertheless that is the way it is.

The reasons advanced in explanation of the amendment are not totally satisfactory to me. I think perhaps my friends to the right have done a cute bit of grandstanding that everybody will see through. I ask those who point the finger at us and say, "Where are your CCF-ers, New Democrats and men of principle?" When they see an opportunity to provide a little embarrassment, "Where is the principle of the Conservative party?" I regret to say that these stalwarts to my right, these hon. gentlemen, have in fact placed statesmanship over principle.

An hon. Member: Shame!

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Allan J. MacEachen (President of the Privy Council): Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a few brief remarks concerning the amendment moved this afternoon by the hon. member for Northumberland-Durham (Mr. Lawrence). The proposition placed before the House on behalf of the government was moved at about three o'clock by my colleague, the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs (Mr. Gray), recommending that a joint committee of the House of Commons and of the Senate be established to inquire into food prices in Canada.

We proposed that proposition and made that recommendation to the House because we believe, on the basis of experience, that members of the other place could make a contribution to an inquiry of this kind. We were justified in that belief because of the results of the last joint committee inquiry into prices in which Senators, including Senator Croll, made a very important contribution.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. MacEachen: Probably no person in Canadian public life, other than possibly the hon. member for Vancouver-Kingsway (Mrs. MacInnis), has been more identified with the interests of the consumer than Senator Croll. It was because of this we recommended to the House that the

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other place join with us in this inquiry. The hon. member for Waterloo (Mr. Saltsman) justified that conclusion, because he admitted quite frankly that the members of the other place did make a contribution. Now simply because 20 minutes later the hon. member for Northumberland-Durham presented an amendment to this House to the effect that we do not want the Senate, we on this side see no reason, either because of his argument or any evidence adduced since, to depart from the proposition put to the House by the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. MacEachen: I attempted to anticipate what might happen in this House. I must say I was only partly correct in my prediction. I knew there was an amendment to come. I told myself there would be an amendment to delete the participation of the Senate. I expected that amendment to come from members of the New Democratic Party. Imagine my surprise when the hon. member for Northumberland-Durham, attempting to cast himself in the raiment of a radical just fresh from his association with all the financial and industrial interests of Bay Street, asks us to believe him when he says he does not believe the Senate ought to participate in this inquiry.

When the leader of the New Democratic Party stated in Toronto that the Conservative party would vote for the communist manifesto, I thought he was going too far. But I think his criticism was moderate in light of the about-face that was presented to the House today by the hon. member for Northumberland-Durham of the official opposition. We have been charged with accepting stolen goods. Well, this is a great act of theft on the part of the Conservative party from the members of the New Democratic Party. I do not want to go on further in that vein.

The Prime Minister of Canada (Mr. Trudeau) made proposals to the constitutional conference in respect of the Constitution of Canada in which the government proposed that the Senate would continue as an integral part of the Canadian constitution and as part of our parliamentary system. A joint committee of the House of Commons and of the Senate studied the constitution and in its conclusions recommended the continuance of the Senate as part of the essential constitution of Canada. The members of the NDP have never accepted that proposition. Members of the official opposition, I understand, have accepted that proposition and it seems to me it is highly contradictory that in this move they should attempt to deny members of the other place the right to participate in a traditional role which they have performed under our system.

• (2130)

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. MacEachen: We regard this for what it is, a cute little bit of grandstanding, an effort on the part of the official opposition to feel out the contours of the NDP bed. We do not deny them that pleasure for the weekend.

We cannot support this amendment. It is obvious from the speeches which have been made that probably the