

Tenure of Senators

Lapointe, Florence Bird, Jacques Flynn and Duff Roblin, all of whom I regard as friends. I am sure others would like to add other names, but at least I want to get it on the record that there are persons in that other place whom I like very much and who in my view are sincere and earnest in what they are trying to do.

However, Mr. Speaker, even though one can assert that there are fine persons over in that other place, and they never speak of us as the other place, they speak of us as "down in the House of Commons", even though they have produced a number of excellent reports, and even though some of them work hard, as is the case with those who are now on the Special Joint Committee on the Constitution, the fundamental fact of the Senate is that its members are not elected. They do not fit into the idea of democracy and they are not responsible to anyone. They get their appointments on the recommendation of the prime minister of the day and after they have been appointed by the prime minister they are not even responsible back to him, or back to her, if the picture changes.

Mr. Herbert: Neither are we.

Mr. Knowles: We are responsible to the people who elected us and we have to go back every five years, four years, three, two or one to find out whether we have carried out our responsibilities. Senators have no responsibility to anyone and I submit, though that may have seemed a reasonable way to set things up back in 1867 when the public believed in democracy, but not all the way, in the 114 years that have gone by since then surely we have come to the point that we really do believe in democracy.

I was interested in the quotation from Gordon Robertson that if we had a one-House Parliament we would be unique as a federation. I do not see anything wrong about being unique. There are lots of other ways I would like Canada to be unique and there are ways in which I think we are unique. I have not had time since I heard the quotation to go somewhere to check on the facts of the situation, but, as a matter of fact, I suspect we are unique in this area already, certainly among federations in the western world, in that we have a second chamber which is appointed rather than elected. It is that which is wrong about the whole situation.

The reports my hon. friend referred to are good reports. The senators have done a lot of work. I remember a debate I had on radio some time ago with then Senator Eugene Forsey. We got into these usual arguments, and at one point I suggested to him that only about 25 members of the other place carried the load, did the work. He not only accepted my figure of 25, he said perhaps it was a bit high.

We have 20 or 25 people doing good work making reports but we keep on full pay, good pay with pensions and all the rest of it, 104 or 106 individuals who get the nod from the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau). Of course, every time there is a vacancy there are lots of others looking for the nod, and not only political persons. I am interested in the number of times I find columnists in newspapers taking advantage of the fact

they can get in print that they do not want to see the Senate abolished, they want to get into it.

If we want 25 people on staff to do good work such as the 25 active senators do, okay, let us set up such a body, but to have 106 on full pay, giving that group of 106 the same legal power over legislation that elected representatives have, I think is for the birds. I think it is completely out of the picture.

Let me say to the hon. member for Vaudreuil that he renders a service when he asks this House to consider the Senate and what ought to be done about it, but surely it requires more than just what the hon. member for Capilano calls this one little shingle nail in the present structure.

● (1650)

One of the comments I will make about the hon. member's bill is that if it did go into effect, it would immediately cost us more money. At the present time senators stay over there until they are 75, but under this bill they would be retiring at whatever age they might be when the tide ran out. They would retire at 40, 45 or 50 and go onto pensions, whereas now we have to pay only the senators who are there. The ones over 75 do not live very long. We not only would have to pay the ones there but we would also have to pay those with 10, 12, 14 or 15 years' service who earned fairly good pensions.

My hon. friend's motive in producing a discussion of the Senate is good but his suggestion really does not touch the basic problem, and that is that we need a Parliament which is fully democratic and responsible to the people out there who elect us.

My hon. friend, the hon. member for Capilano, is quite right in expressing the problems of regionalism we have, but his theory of increasing the strength of the Senate we have now no more meets those problems than my friend's bill meets the problem of a representative or elected Senate. I think we have to find ways to solve the problem of regionalism.

We have to find a way to work a measure of proportional representation into this House of Commons so that a government will represent all of the regions. I think we will have to work hard politically for the kind of government that is concerned for the people in all parts of the country. I think we have to strengthen the committee structure. We do not need just to strengthen it; we have to scrap it and build a new one which gives members from all parts of the country a chance to have an input into the solving of the problems which affect them in the various areas. I say with great respect that neither this 10 to 15-year limit nor the stronger upper House about which the hon. member for Capilano talks will solve the problem.

I should sit down. The last word I want to say is that I wonder how much longer we will let people talk about needing the Senate for sober second thought. That is a real insult to this House of Commons. My experience here is that in this House we are sober.

Mr. David Weatherhead (Scarborough West): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to take part in this debate, if only for the final