

Senate Reform

was charged with looking after the subject matter of the Bill presented by my colleague for St. John's East (Mr. McGrath).

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Blaker): Shall all orders listed under Private Members' Public Bills preceding Order 440 be allowed to stand by unanimous consent?

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Blaker): Is the House ready for the question?

Some Hon. Members: Question.

Amendment (Mr. Ferguson) agreed to.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Blaker): Accordingly the order is discharged, the Bill withdrawn, and the subject matter thereof referred to the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections.

Bill withdrawn and order discharged.

* * *

THE SENATE OF CANADA REFORM ACT

MEASURE TO ESTABLISH

Mr. Bill Yurko (Edmonton East) moved that Bill C-640, an Act to provide for structural reform of the Senate of Canada, be read the second time and referred to the Standing Committee on Justice and Legal Affairs.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I thank you and the House for the opportunity to speak on my Private Members' Bill C-640, an Act to provide for structural reform of the Canadian Senate.

My intense interest in Senate reform began in 1978 after I had resigned my ministerial post in the Government of Alberta. Since then, I have pursued several initiatives in regard to Senate reform.

This House is aware that on November 18, 1981, I introduced a motion to establish a joint committee of this House and the Senate to bring before Parliament a Bill to provide for structural reform of the Senate. That motion was seconded by the Hon. Member for Nepean-Carleton (Mr. Baker) and was debated in the House on June 4, 1982.

On November 3, 1981, I introduced Bill C-640, an Act to provide for the structural reform of the Senate of Canada. We are today debating this Bill, and I trust that Members will not hesitate to participate in the discussion.

On December 20, 1982, I released a major report entitled "Renewed Federalism; Structural Reform of the Canadian Senate". This is a major study on the origin of the Senate, its mechanics and composition, followed by a review of recent Senate reform proposals. It includes an analysis of the consequences of the Constitution Act 1981 and the new amending formula on the future of Senate reform. It also discusses the need for legitimacy, accountability, independence, and stability as well as continuity in a reformed Senate.

This is followed by an in-depth analysis of structure and content, the foundation and analysis that underlie the evolution of Bill C-640. Every Member received a copy of this report. Several thousand copies have been distributed and it is now listed as a Parliamentary Library document. The report fully discusses Bill C-640.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, the report has been translated into French and 500 copies in this official language were recently distributed. I wish to publicly apologize that it has taken so long to get the report translated and printed in French.

Many people have received a copy of the report and have commented on its content. In particular, Senator Eugene Forsey examined the document in depth. His comments have been both pertinent and useful, and I publicly thank him very much for them. All political observers acknowledge that Senate reform is urgent and is the first priority for additional constitutional reform.

• (1430)

On December 16, 1982 the Government introduced in the Senate a notice of motion to establish a Joint Committee of the Senate and House of Commons to consider Senate structural reform and to bring forth a proposal no later than December 1, 1983. The Government resolution is very similar; in fact, it is almost a copy of the resolution that I introduced on November 18, 1981. The Government resolution originating in the Senate on December 16, 1982 was approved by the House months ago. Why has the Government not moved sooner with the resolution to get the Joint Committee working? Why did it wait until yesterday after it knew we were going to debate Senate reform through Bill C-640 today? It seems to me that the Government only moves when it is prodded. Nevertheless, we must get on with the process of Senate structural reform.

Certainly the first priority is the economy of the nation, but the sickness of that very economy to a large degree is the result of a weak, ineffective and uncaring Senate. The economic failures can be attributed to the failure of federal provincial relations, as the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) said in one of his latest interviews, and the lack of meaningful regional and provincial input into national economic and social policies. This input and restraint was partially the function of the Senate. But it failed to restrain the Government throughout the seventies and it completely capitulated to the Government in the eighties.

The Senate must be reformed. The function of the Senate is to represent adequately in the Canadian Parliament the national interest, the regional interests and the provincial interests. With respect to the national interest, its over-riding function is national unity, national cohesiveness and national accountability. Where was the Senate voice during the Quebec referendum, or during the growth of separatism in the West? It was not heard.

Where was the voice of the Senate in regard to regional interests during the entire debate over the National Energy Program? It was not heard.