

British North America Act

as it should. Indeed, the Senate itself has offered very substantial suggestions with regard to reform.

I am somewhat surprised at the attitude of the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre. My research indicates that a member of the other place, Senator Croll, has been active for a number of years. By some strange coincidence, Senator Croll has been very active in that sector of our national business in which the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre is also active, namely, social security legislation. The hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre knows that Senator Croll participated in the committee on aging, as well as the committee which studied the question of poverty. Indeed, he made representations that went very far in the direction the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre is advocating. I suggest there may have been a bit of plagiarism on the part of the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre in the propositions he was advancing in relation to social security and welfare legislation.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Or vice versa.

● (1730)

Mr. Blais: Mr. Speaker, I suggest that the Senate committees on aging and poverty advanced greatly the cause of social security in this country.

I now wish to quote from page 319 of the Senate Debates of March 13, 1973. Senator Croll had the floor. Referring to the committee on aging he said:

After that came the Special Committee of the Senate on Aging, from 1963 to 1967. That was a great plus for the Senate. The report was imaginative; it was a blessing for the aged. It is interesting to see what we said in 1966. Nobody else ever reads these reports, and now and then I feel better if I look at them. I should like to quote from that report, although I notice here some people who were on the committee and who know what was in it.

I will mention some of the recommendations made in that report. I agree with Senator Croll. The work of the Senate is not given enough publicity.

Recommendation (1) read as follows:

The committee endorses in principle the institution of an income guarantee program for all persons aged 65 and over—

Then, pensions were not paid to people under 70, but the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre was advocating reducing the pensionable age to 65. Let me continue quoting Senator Croll, as follows:

—Then it goes on:

And the Senator quoted from the report:

The establishment of a technically competent body to study the income needs of older people and to develop a socially acceptable minimum budget for single persons and couples, which would be adjusted automatically each year on the basis of a suitable index of consumer spending or of earnings, with a review every five years to reflect changes in the relative circumstances of the working population and the retired population.

That proposal was almost realized. Senator Croll continued quoting from the recommendation, which suggested:

—that the program be administered and financed by the federal government.

—that the procedure call for the completion of a simplified income form annually and that the amount by which the declared income falls short of the established minima in any year constitute the benefit for the year following.

[Mr. Blais.]

We now have the guaranteed income supplement. I agree it is not based exactly on the recommendations in the report. I am quoting from this speech to show the influence of the Senate and Senate committees on legislation presented in this House.

As recorded at page 320, Senator Croll went on to say:

Honourable senators, we now come to the Special Committee on Poverty, 1968-72. The participants are in this house. Some senators may think that I am particularly prejudiced, and I may be. Why not? I tell you frankly that it is a bench mark in Canadian social history. It brought issues out into the open which cannot be ignored, and the report is not being ignored. We lit a fire that will not be extinguished. Our report was needed, it was provided, and it was enthusiastically received.

Let me say that the guaranteed annual income concept was really at the core of that report. Also, the concept advocated by the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre is presently a subject of experiment in Manitoba, and is being negotiated between the provinces and the federal government. The Ontario government has instituted a program which is a feeble attempt to implement the recommendations in the Senate committee. Mr. Speaker, Senate committees have made substantial contributions to our society.

I do not think that the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre can claim to be the author or originator of these particular policies as they were discussed in Senate committees. As the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre himself has said, the Senate established other committees. For instance, the Committee on Land brought about in large measure legislation affecting programs such as FRED, ARDA and regional development.

We cannot value these contributions in dollars and cents. They have led to a restructuring of our national fabric. I agree that only since 1958 have we made progress because of the work of these committees. Before then there was not much activity. I therefore suggest that in the Senate we see the potential for good which will affect the entire nation. I agree that the other place is not perfect. I suggest to the hon. member that we ought to strive to reform that institution so that its contributions may multiply and improve.

When I last spoke I suggested that the Senate has no tendency to suicide. On the contrary, senators want to live forever; that is our difficulty, and there is no way they will pass legislation abolishing the Senate. They will not stand for it, unless there is a reference to the country. That being so, why not encourage the government to reform the other place?

In the same speech on March 13 Senator Croll raised 12 points concerning Senate reform which I shall bring to the attention of the House as, evidently, they have not been discussed here previously. First he suggested that:

The present absolute veto power of the Senate over all legislation should be reduced to a suspensive veto for six months according to the following formula:—

This idea has been accepted. The Senate does not exercise any real legislative veto. The hon. member spoke of the privacy bill which was sent to the Senate, amended by the Senate and sent back to this House. Any veto the other place may exercise is a suspensive veto. I can think of no legislation which will be sent to the other place and with