

Retirement Age for Senators

This would allow them to retire, not, as I heard the other day, when we were discussing old age pensions, with dignity, but with a handsome reward, that is a pension of \$8,000 to \$12,000. Such vacancies would allow the party in office, as happened in the case of some appointments made by the Conservative party when it was in office, to name young senators who were very active in politics, who could continue to render tremendous services not so much to the Canadian people as to the political party having appointed them.

Therefore, I find Bill No. C-98 a very timid effort at Senate reform. There is a host of very able Canadians engaged in business, there are many associations and movements of national scope who find that it costs a lot to retain a senator who is no longer very active and who, in their views, will not contribute much from the legislative point of view, although he may still, through his influence, be of service to the political party which appointed him.

Some talked of drastic measures, such as the abolition of the Senate; others advocated rather weak reforms as insignificant as those contained in Bill No. C-98.

I wonder if one can really take seriously that legislation, that amendment to the Senate Act in order to pay that pension. I wonder if it is more serious to be on the side of those here who ask for a drastic reform and would be inclined to ask for its abolition. I feel it is more serious to lean that way than to waste time trying to make people believe that a drastic reform of the Canadian Senate is involved. Besides, public opinion is strongly in favour of the abolition of the other house.

In Quebec a bill was presented recently to limit drastically the powers of that province's Legislative Council.

I wonder if, in a Parliament made up of 265 representatives elected by the people at elections held every four years, it would not be possible to find the elements needed to ensure a political and economic continuity that could lead this country to its fullest development, as regards the prosperity and security of the people, and to maintain, because such was the wish expressed in the Canadian constitution, a Senate to protect minorities that could be subjected sometimes to a strong current of public opinion against their rights.

I believe that the minorities in Canada today, because of the bill of rights, are less and less in need of the protection afforded by the Senate. To obtain justice nowadays,

[Mr. Perron.]

minorities need the other place less and less as my colleague from Lake St. John said, if the Senate was meant to protect the minorities, that institution surely did not prove itself too useful, throughout its long years of service, as regards the rights of minorities in Canada. Canadian minorities are not against the abolition of the Canadian Senate, the institution we call the other place.

If the Senate appointments are only a political recognition for services rendered, I wonder if we should go on thus recognizing people who, in most cases, have already benefited from their political position to a very large extent. In fact, most of them at a given time were considered as leaders in the Canadian economic field because of their directorates in several large companies and may often have directed their way of thinking not towards the pursuit of the common good but in the interests of a given group, or to protect their own group. If I look back on the appointments made in the last 50 years, I find that a large number of the appointees held as well a most important position in the economic sector of the country and often upheld the interests of certain companies, which was often in their own interest, through the power and influence they exercised because of their position in the other place.

So, as far as appointments are concerned, let no one tell us that the reform contemplated in Bill No. C-98 is the answer to the needs and wishes of the Canadian people. The people seriously believe in a reform of the structure of the other place, the Senate, in the matter of appointments and dealings which, in many cases, have been going on for many years. As far as appointments are concerned, we have given our views—some were given out in public—and it is that 50 per cent of the appointments should be made by the federal government and 50 per cent by the provincial governments.

● (2:50 p.m.)

There again the danger of a strictly political influence would exist. My colleague from Villeneuve (Mr. Caouette) has introduced a measure to revise the Senate Act. In my opinion, the aims of this bill reflect the consensus and might be accepted by a great number of members.

I am now making a suggestion that could be fully looked into, namely, that a third of the Senate members—since we want to maintain this institution—could be appointed by the federal government; a third could be appointed by the provincial governments and the other third, by national organizations.