

*Supply*

• (1550)

I raise these areas in which change in Senate powers, new powers, could be introduced and provide a worthwhile and valuable role, a necessary countervailing power granting conditions at the end of the century to an executive power that many feel has become presidential and therefore without the checks and balances however applied to presidential power in the United States and some other countries.

How would we change the Senate? Granted there are the difficulties of amending it and expecting that we are not going to have a fundamental act of constituent power that usually occurs only after revolutions or great military victories in other countries. Certainly some changes could be made by convention, by custom.

The Government of Alberta proceeded to elect somebody whom it designated as a candidate for appointment to the Senate. In one case the Prime Minister of Canada accepted that advice and appointed the person so elected. If that were followed it could create a general practice.

More interestingly, the Mulroney government, after the failure of the Meech Lake accord, proceeded to name four Quebec senators following the procedures outlined in the Meech Lake accord of consultation with the provincial attorney general and premier. Some would say that those are better Quebec senators than the usual type of nomination; interesting persons in any case.

In the meantime, though, the Senate itself can exercise self-restraint in its powers. Again to quote our Latin scholars, it probably would better to use the Fabian tactic of delay and conciliation without it trying directly to defeat measures.

I say this in welcoming the role of the Senate, a discreet role in relation to Bill C-18. I am not speaking of the confrontation with the House which I think would be unacceptable according to my constitutional thinking, but of the quiet conversations by individual senators with members of the House that seem to have produced a felicitous accord between the two Houses—maybe I am being premature—as to whether and how Bill C-18 should be adopted in its revised form.

This sort of process of interaction between two houses, a dialectical process, is very much in accord with the evolution of democratic constitutionalism. It produces a sensible and pragmatic approach to revising, updating and modernizing an institution that was honoured in its origins but has failed to keep pace with the changes in Canadian society, with the views on political representation and political constitutional legitimacy flowing from that and with the changes in other countries.

I commend to members, in voting on this measure which has my full support, that we keep in mind an agenda for constitutional change involving the upper house; that we keep in mind that the constitution is not simply an issue of the place of one or more provinces in Confederation, renewed or otherwise, but that there are larger issues involving the relationship between the citizen and the state; that we keep in mind that there are better functioning and more modern institutions that correspond more exactly to the main trends in democratic constitutionalism. This sort of change would do much to restore public confidence in our parliamentary institutions and in the people who serve them.

On this basis I am happy to support the motion as introduced.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Jean-Guy Chrétien (Frontenac):** Mr. Speaker, I listened very carefully to what was said by the hon. member for Vancouver Quadra, and I would appreciate his comments on the Legislative Council of what was then known as the Legislative Assembly in Quebec City. In 1967, Premier Daniel Johnson senior abolished the Legislative Council. Well, you know how these things work. There was the usual wheeling and dealing, and finally the councillors agreed to be voted out of existence.

• (1555)

I would also like to recall for the benefit of the hon. member and this is another point, that I used to live in one of seven so-called protected ridings in Quebec.

**An hon. member:** Protected under the Constitution.

**Mr. Chrétien (Frontenac):** Yes, under the Constitution. I lived in Wolfe, where there were about 6,000 voters at the time, compared with nearly 100,000 in Westmount. There were six or seven protected ridings, and to revoke their protected status required a unanimous resolution of the Quebec National Assembly. So the members for these ridings agreed to vote their ridings out of existence and themselves out of a job. Of course, a number of mutually acceptable arrangements were made.

I think that is the price we have to pay, because after going back in time several hundred years during the very interesting overview the hon. member gave us earlier, when we get back to the situation today in 1994, and soon in 2000, well, the Senate—to laugh. In any case, when I mention the Senate in Frontenac, people tend to laugh. I will not repeat everything they said, but they do not take the Senate very seriously.