

That the motion be not now adopted, but that it be amended by deleting the name of the Honourable Senator Neiman and by adding the name of the Honourable Senator Lavoie-Roux, and by deleting the name of the Honourable Senator Doyle and by adding the name of the Honourable Senator Robertson.

Is it your pleasure, honourable senators, to adopt the motion in amendment?

Hon. Joyce Fairbairn (Leader of the Government): Honourable senators, one thing on which I agree with Senator Lynch-Staunton right from the start is that I, too, did not believe that my first comments in the Senate in this new session of Parliament would be devoted to the question of the Committee of Selection.

First, I should like to answer three questions posed by the honourable senator in his remarks. He asked whether senators on his side of the house are irrelevant. The answer is: certainly not. He asked whether the independent senators are irrelevant. The answer is: certainly not. He asked whether the majority in this chamber prevails: The majority definitely prevails.

The motion we introduced yesterday, to which Senator Lynch-Staunton has proposed an amendment, is straightforward. It calls for the establishment of a Committee of Selection made up of nine senators — five Liberals and four Conservatives. The amendment just moved would make the composition of the committee five Conservatives and four Liberals.

Although our motion was in itself clear, the reasons for the wording of the particular motion may not be clear to all honourable senators. It is true that, over the last several years since I have been here, the majority party in the Senate has had the majority on the Committee of Selection. This occurred when we began our sessions in 1984, 1986, 1988 and 1989. Honourable senators will remember a slight blip in 1991 as we began the Third Session of the 34th Parliament. The government was given a majority on the Committee of Selection even though at that time it had a plurality rather than a majority in the Senate. That is the recent history on this particular subject.

The motion before us, as originally moved, takes a different approach. It seeks a majority on the Committee of Selection on behalf, not of the majority party in this place but of the party which forms the government of Canada. Yes, we are a minority in this house.

Senator Lynch-Staunton said something at the beginning of his remarks to the effect that these matters are discussed and, in the end, we speak as a reflection of the views held within our caucuses. He does that, as do I. In this sense, it was the view of our caucus that the motion put forward yesterday reflected the nature of a different political situation in which we find ourselves.

In the other place, there has been a major realignment of political parties. That realignment — perhaps one of the most different and dramatic in the history of our country — occurred as a direct result of Canadians voting in an election. Obviously, it

is a realignment that is not reflected in this chamber. Perhaps this is one of the areas about which we will have discussions and, perhaps, legitimate arguments.

In the Senate there is no representative of the official opposition in the House of Commons. For that matter, there is no representative of the other recognized opposition party, or of the NDP. However, with respect to the NDP, that is something we are accustomed to in this place.

It was argued by Senator Lynch-Staunton that there was a similar situation in 1984 when the Liberals retained their majority in this chamber following the massive majority government which was won by the Conservative Party at the polls. However, there is a difference.

• (1530)

In 1984, the Liberal Party emerged from the election as the party chosen by the people to be the official opposition — that is, the alternative to the government. Following the 1993 election, the official opposition is a party which has not a single member in this house.

After the 1984 election, those senators who supported the new government then did not seek the majority on the Committee of Selection. That was their decision at the time. The mandates given in 1993 to the two parties represented in this house now are very different from what they were in 1984. It is our view that this cannot be completely ignored. Although we operate independently from the House of Commons, we cannot ignore the electoral realities that shape that house. We do not operate in complete isolation from it. The motion we moved for this Committee of Selection reflects that view.

The supporters of the government are, in effect, making a proposal to the Senate. We believe that it is the government's role and its task to make proposals as to what the Senate might do. There is consultation and negotiation between us on all of these matters — and there must be. Obviously, the Senate as a whole, on this motion as on all other motions, will accept or reject what is proposed. The preference of the majority will indeed prevail.

This move in the last two days has not been intended in any way — and I wish to emphasize that — as a signal of confrontation or of steamrolling. Quite the contrary. It is our hope — and I said this earlier today — that we can work in this Parliament with a high degree of cooperation not only in terms of our legislative responsibilities but also, as we began today, on any initiatives that we may take on important matters of public policy that need the kind of forum the Senate of Canada can provide. We want to make Parliament and this particular institution as effective, as productive, and as responsive as possible.

Honourable senators, we are very aware of the party standings in this chamber. The motion to establish the Committee of Selection is one of the first actions taken by the Senate since the election. This particular motion, honourable senators, was intended as a small reflection of changes that have taken place in the political landscape.