

raised a problem which should be clarified in the chamber. I apologize for not speaking to the chairman of the Social Affairs committee beforehand.

Hon. Gildas L. Molgat: Honourable senators, I personally do not see any problem in the matter if the Senate agrees. The only difficulty which would arise would be when we come to the definition of what the responsibilities are in terms of various committees. "Senior citizens" do not appear directly as a responsibility of the Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology. Admittedly, when you seek to find where senior citizens might be dealt with, the logic would be, quite obviously, that their concerns should be the responsibility of that committee.

The question is really whether the Senate has any objections to the matter. It was brought to my attention and that is the only reason I mentioned it to Senator Marshall.

As we all know, no committee can give to a subcommittee any powers which it does not have itself. It can only extend to a subcommittee powers which it holds by virtue of a reference from the Senate. There is no specific mention of senior citizens, but, by logic, that is where this responsibility belongs.

[Translation]

Hon. Arthur Tremblay: Honourable senators, in an attempt to clarify the issue that was raised, I would like to point out that the list of subjects to be referred to the Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology is not restrictive. It says:

... relating to social affairs, science and technology generally, including:

And then the list follows. That is my first point, which is basically what Senator Molgat said.

Furthermore, we have a Subcommittee on Veterans Affairs as an offshoot of the Committee on Social Affairs, and if we want to expand the name of the subcommittee, the Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology does not give the subcommittee new powers. It merely changes its name, which means that when a referral is made by the Senate to the Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology, any question concerning senior citizens may be referred to the subcommittee.

If I am not mistaken, that is the function of a Senate committee and the subcommittees under its jurisdiction. It has no powers except in so far as the Senate refers a question to the committee, whether it happens to be a bill or any other subject. In fact, it is not a question of power but of convenience, as Senator Marshall pointed out.

Personally, I don't see any problem, except that the Senate should say there is no problem. Substantially, I don't see any problem at all, either with the name or with the kind of powers that are implicitly conferred, since there are none.

Senator Molgat: Honourable senators, since I am not entitled to speak a second time, I want to ask Senator Tremblay a question.

[Senator Marshall.]

Does the subcommittee intend to conduct a special inquiry on senior citizens? If it does, then there might be a problem. In fact, I don't think the order of reference was made to the standing committee.

Senator Tremblay: Honourable senators, to answer this question I suppose we could go so far as to say that when the Senate referred the book it had a blue cover but was the equivalent of a kind of Green Paper—

Senator Molgat: They are all blue!

Senator Tremblay:—on child benefits and old age benefits. The entire document was referred by the Senate to the Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology about two or three years ago. One might say that in that case, the order of reference was implicit.

In fact, the Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology has submitted its final report on child benefits, which was discussed here in this Chamber. I quite agree that if Senator Marshall's plans include further study of the subject of senior citizens, I think the senator would have no objection to asking the Senate to refer this question for consideration. I think that would simplify matters.

I did point out, I may recall, that implicitly there had already been an order to refer the subject to the Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology.

[English]

Senator Marshall: I point out to Senator Molgat that the committee has already heard witnesses give evidence pertaining to matters relating to senior citizens.

The only issue, as I see it, is a requirement for a change in the name, and that would have to be dealt with by Standing Committee on Standing Rules and Orders, because this matter does not appear in the standing orders.

Senator MacEachen raised this matter in the first place and he probably has a valid point.

● (1640)

Hon. Allan J. MacEachen (Leader of the Opposition): Honourable senators, I noticed the decision of the Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology to create a subcommittee on veterans affairs, and then to add a further mandate, namely, senior citizens. The purpose of Senator Marshall's inquiry is to draw to the attention of the Senate the fact that the parent committee has created a subcommittee and has given it a new mandate entitled "senior citizens".

The Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology is established to deal with social affairs, science and technology generally, including veterans affairs, Indian and Inuit affairs, cultural affairs and the arts, social and labour matters, health and welfare, pensions, housing, fitness and amateur sports, employment and immigration, consumer affairs and youth affairs. The question that one immediately asks is whether it is within the power of the senior committee to strike a subcommittee on each of these subjects which are included within its mandate. That could lead to a