

*Suggested Senate Reform*

unusual practice of asking for a pledge in advance as to what course members to be appointed to the Senate would follow in relation to the subject of Senate reform. That very unusual practice, which in the ordinary course of events would certainly be open to challenge on the ground that it denied freedom of opinion as well as freedom of speech to the members of the Senate, surely emphasizes the tremendous importance attached to this subject by Mr. King and presumably by those who supported him at that time.

Then there is a very illuminating question and answer to be found in *Hansard* for 1940 at page 2322, volume III. It reads as follows:

Mr. Coldwell: I would ask the Prime Minister in view of the difficulty that has arisen, whether he will consider his long-promised reform of the Senate at the next session of parliament.

Mr. Mackenzie King: That is something I have been considering all my life.

That illuminating answer, Mr. Speaker, which is now part of the history of parliament, does suggest that perhaps the party to which Mr. King belonged should seek to fulfil his life-long dream. It would seem appropriate that the pledge so often made should be undertaken. Obviously this matter cannot be dealt with in the present session. For that reason it is not my purpose to move, as I have on earlier occasions, for the setting up of a constitutional convention, nor is it my purpose on this occasion to propose the setting up of a joint committee of the two houses as I have on other occasions. I do so only because of the fact that I recognize that it must be the responsibility of the government to decide which course it will follow.

On different occasions when we have made these proposals the government has evaded the issue on the ground that this is a responsibility they must accept, and of course they have given other grounds as well. The matter has come up at different times so I recognize that on some occasions it has been opposed for other reasons. I hope that no one will feel that there is any other reason for not supporting the motion at this time and in this case fulfilling the life-long dream of a former prime minister of Canada.

I specifically propose that this should not be regarded as a want of confidence motion. I specifically propose that this motion should be accepted by the government, as other motions have been, as an expression of opinion of the house that whatever steps the government deems advisable should now be taken to start the preliminary steps towards the fulfilment of this pledge which has been before us for so many years. I am sure that it is in the interests of all Canadians at this time that we should do everything we can

[Mr. Drew.]

to establish a feeling of confidence in the minds of the people of Canada that their parliamentary system is effective, is sound and is operating to the best advantage of the people of Canada.

After all, we have been told so often that the best answer to any propaganda on behalf of any other system is the efficiency of our own system. There may be some question about the efficiency of proceedings in this house. That, however, is something we are perfectly free to deal with and can deal with on other occasions as we have in the past. I doubt if there is an hon. member of the house, and I would hope there is not an hon. member of the other house, who will assert that the Senate as now constituted is capable of performing the functions for which it was originally intended. I hope that the members of this house have noticed that only within the past few days hon. members of the Senate have asked that they be given a greater opportunity to perform their responsibilities.

That indicates quite clearly that members of the other house are as concerned as we should be about the effectiveness of the parliamentary system which embraces both the House of Commons and the other house that is within these parliament buildings of Canada. I suggest that we should not disregard the fact that, amongst other considerations, questions arise as to the method of appointment, as to the tenure of office and as to the proportion of representation which will most effectively assure the original purpose.

Without quoting at any length the thoughts that were in the minds of those who brought about the system, I should like to quote certain words from a speech by Sir John Macdonald in the legislature in 1865, two years before confederation. It is to be found on page 35 of the reports of those deliberations. He said:

In order to protect local interests, and to prevent sectional jealousies, it was found requisite that the three great divisions into which British North America is separated should be represented in the upper house on the principle of equality.

There are three great sections, having different interests, in this proposed confederation. We have western Canada, an agricultural country far away from the sea, and having the largest population who have agricultural interests principally to guard. We have lower Canada, with other and separate interests, and especially with institutions and laws which she jealously guards against absorption by any larger, more numerous, or stronger power. And we have the maritime provinces, having also different sectional interests of their own, having, from their position, classes and interests which we do not know in western Canada. Accordingly, in the upper house—the controlling and regulating, but not the initiating, branch (for we know that here as in England, to