

Tenure of Senators

Even my own colleague, when he was minister of finance, forgot all about the housing problem on the west coast in the MURB decision contained in his budget of December, 1979. Had that region had an input, that item, which caused unbelievable dissension out there, would not have been in that budget. The vacancy rate was below one per cent and it needed a government stimulus. There should have been regional input.

The four regions I mentioned should have input at the decision-making tables when definitions are made with regard to bioscience as it applies to resources, to fiscal policies, monetary policies and so on. Only then will we start to resolve the intense alienation which exists in this country. I plead with those who represent the population centres of this land to give this suggestion serious thought.

Do not label people like me non-Canadian. You will not get away with that. My life and my record is the other way. However, I am prepared to fight for my region in an attempt to build a stronger federation, a bottom-up federation, a federation which represents the regions of this great land.

Hon. Stanley Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, I suppose I could begin by saying to the hon. member for Vaudreuil (Mr. Herbert) that his bill goes in the right direction. At the present time, apart from the few older senators who are there for life, those who are appointed to the Senate stay there until age 75. Under Bill C-303, their term would be cut to a period of anywhere from ten to 15 years, but no longer.

I say that goes in the right direction. I would go further. I would cut their tenure to five years, then one year, six months, and then cut them out altogether. In case I seem to be putting my tongue in my cheek when I speak of the bill going in the right direction, let me make it clear that I do not think the bill touches the problem of the Senate as part of our democracy at all. I do not think it is an answer to the view that many of us hold, that there is no place in our parliamentary democracy for a body that is not elected, not responsible to anyone and that as the Senate now stands it should be abolished.

I was greatly interested in the speech made by my hon. friend. I kept waiting for him to give the reason for the proposal in his bill. Indeed, I kept waiting for him to refer to it. He did read the clause about the tenure. My friend and colleague, the hon. member for Mission-Port Moody (Mr. Rose) had the same feeling of expectation. I thought he summed up the hon. member's speech very well when he said that even with all the fine things he is telling us about the Senate and how good it is, its members are good for only ten years.

As I say, I do not think it gets to the heart of the problem at all. I might say to my good friend the hon. member for Capilano (Mr. Huntington), who always makes his point very clear, that we appreciate the problems he has discussed again today. We appreciate his deep concern over regionalism. By the same token, I do not think the Senate is any answer to that set of problems.

● (1640)

Before I get a little more directly into the question itself, may I say I welcome the fact that once again we are discussing in the House of Commons of Canada a bill to amend an act which is not in this country at all, the British North America Act. Of course, my hon. friend is doing that, as I have tried on a number of occasions with amendments to the British North America Act, under the provisions of section 9(1) which says that the Parliament of Canada may make amendments to the British North America Act in respect of matters that are exclusively federal. We have exercised that right on a number of occasions, and the rationale usually is that our statutes are enacted by the Crown, and since the British North America Act was enacted by the Crown in the person of Queen Victoria it is being amended by the Crown in the person of Queen Elizabeth on the advice of the Senate and the House of Commons of Canada.

Referring to that amendment to the British North America Act which was passed in 1949 I am disposed to make a comment all of us often make, namely that the accidents of history can be very strange and can have long-lasting effects. I had sufficient conversation with Mr. St. Laurent, who was Prime Minister at that time, to know he was very anxious to complete the process of the Canadianization of our Constitution. Section 91(1) was the first step to bring to Canada the right to amend the Constitution in respect of matters exclusively federal. That was done in 1949. I knew Mr. St. Laurent well enough to be able to stand here and say that his hope was that before his term of office as Prime Minister finished he would be able to get the agreement of the provinces and to take the necessary steps to bring the amending of the rest of the Constitution to this country.

Unfortunately the Korean war broke out and other things followed and the well-laid plans of Mr. St. Laurent got set aside. I think it is really quite an unfortunate bit of our history. We might have been able to do all of that in the 1950s with a lot less of the contention, ill will and all the rest of it we are having at the present time. However, that is the way history goes and we have to take it as it comes, doing the best with the situations with which we are confronted.

What we have before us now is this proposal to sweeten the Senate a little bit so we can keep it. We have heard today the usual litany, especially from the hon. member for Vaudreuil, about the fine people over there. They are fine people and I know many of them. They are good Canadians and they work hard, or some of them do, as the hon. member says. Just as in this House there are some one sees around on the job all the time, and there are others one does not know who they are when they turn up.

I recognize the difficulty one gets into by naming anyone at all, but I should like to support what the hon. member said about Carl Goldenberg, a great Canadian who has made a tremendous contribution in a number of fields. I say the same thing for David Croll. I think his contribution in the Senate has been great as was his contribution when he was a member of this House. I should like to add names such as Renaude