

British North America Act

the Clerk at the table, I already have had an opportunity to look into a great number of precedents. I am sure I am aware of the precedents which the hon. member might wish to bring to my attention, and at the time of making my decision I will take those into account.

It being five o'clock, the house will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's order paper, namely public bills and private bills.

BRITISH NORTH AMERICA ACT**AMENDMENT TO ABOLISH THE SENATE**

Mr. Stanley Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre) moved the second reading of Bill No. C-15, to amend the British North America Act, 1867 (abolition of the Senate).

He said: Mr. Speaker, the purpose of this bill is to abolish the Senate. I realized, when I was given the opportunity to do this in private members' hour today, that it might be difficult to achieve this object in 60 minutes. I now find we have only about 47 minutes, so it will be that much more difficult.

The bill itself, Mr. Speaker, is one which most hon. members have seen on previous occasions, because this is not the first time I have introduced it. Indeed, my arguing for the abolition of the Senate goes back over a period of many years.

The terms of the bill are such that they would amend the British North America Act by striking out those sections which establish the Senate and all those sections which refer to it. However, there are one or two places in the British North America Act where we would need to retain some mention of the Senate, because of certain cross-references. The most notable instance of this is the section in the British North America Act which provides that no province of Canada is to have fewer members in the House of Commons than it has members in the Senate. My bill takes care of this by providing that in future no province would have in the House of Commons fewer members than it had in the Senate just prior to the abolition of the upper house.

May I say, Mr. Speaker, that this bill is not being presented in the context of recent appointments to the other place. Public opinion about those appointments already has expressed itself in various ways. It is not presented out of special concern over the amount of money which it costs to maintain the upper house; neither is it presented in

[Mr. Speaker.]

relation to anything the Senate has done or failed to do in recent months. I present it, if I may do so, in an academic sense; I present it on the basis of an appeal to the common sense of Canadians.

May I put it this way: If we in this House of Commons, or we as Canadians who happen to be here in this House of Commons, were called upon to draft a constitution for democratic government for the people of Canada, I do not know the details of the constitution we might produce, but I am reasonably certain we would start with the principle of democracy. I am reasonably certain we would stick with that principle; we would say that the main thing we should provide would be that the people who would govern the country would be elected by the people themselves.

I submit that, if we worked out provisions for election machinery, somehow bringing together in this capital city 200 or 300 members to represent the people, formulate their laws and provide for their government, having done so we would not then take the further step of providing for some one man to appoint a body of another 100 people, non-elected, who would have the authority to veto the decisions of the elected representatives. Is that not precisely what we have in the kind of parliament we have now?

We have this body, the House of Commons, elected by the people of Canada. Not only are we elected by them, but we are responsible back to them. We are here for only a limited period, following which we have to go back to the people who sent us here. On the basis of that authority—on the basis of our having been elected to act—we have the right to make the laws for the people of this country, to speak for them, and to provide, by our support or otherwise of the executive, for the government of this country. Yet we have as part of our constitution a provision for up to 102 men and women, not elected but appointed by the Prime Minister, who have practically all the authority or powers we have and, indeed, have the power to veto the decisions made in this house.

Mr. Leboe: None of them would be elected.

Mr. Knowles: I say, Mr. Speaker, apart from the kind of interest that mention of the Senate always produces, as has been reflected by the interjection of the hon. member for Cariboo (Mr. Leboe), that this does not reflect common sense, it does not reflect responsible government and it does not reflect the principles of democracy. I think we should take a