

Senate Representation

By appointing people who share his particular perspective of Canada, whether it is the president of the CBC, the Clerk of the Privy Council, or whatever, he has moved away from the traditional idea that the people who make the decisions in this country should reflect as much as possible the diversity of the country. Instead of choosing those people, he has tried to choose people in his own image, and that only reflects a part of the country. At a time like this, when a system of government is being smuggled in which increasingly centralizes power in the image of the Prime Minister, it is doubly important that we maintain and strengthen an institution which can speak for the regions of Canada.

This is precisely what the bill would allow us to do in a small way. It would ensure that regions such as the north, which perhaps more than any other is left out of the day to day considerations of the centralized group who run things, would at least have the right of representation in the second chamber of the Parliament of Canada. I think that is an important innovation and one which we in this House should applaud.

I want to deal now with the opportunity that members from southern Canada have to become acquainted with the special problems of that unique region, the north. It is a region which is unique not only in Canada but in the world. It is a region which is little known to most of us here, although some of us have had an opportunity to visit it. The hon. member for Laprairie—the next senator from the Liberal side—had the opportunity to visit the north, as he told us, as a member of the standing committee.

It is clear that the composition of the population, the nature of development, the delicacy of the ecology, the capacity for exploitation of mineral development and the consequences of that exploitation, are different from the problems in other parts of Canada. It is, therefore, important that there be some continuing way in which both chambers of the Parliament of Canada, which are responsible as a whole for deciding the destiny of this country, should reflect that particular and peculiar part of the country. Of course, it is important, as the hon. member for Laprairie indicated, that the standing committee and other members of parliament should visit that unique region as often as possible.

It is helpful that the publicity attending the Berger inquiry and other such inquiries has increased an awareness in southern Canada of what is going on in the north. Some things have increased our understanding of that region, but certainly the government has been deficient in allowing a greater degree of self-government for those areas and not ending the colonial rule of the region. It is too mature and important to be ruled by a bunch of bureaucrats in an ivory tower in Ottawa.

The government has acted too often to limit the capacity of the north to make its own decisions. This bill is an exception to that general practice and allows an opportunity for the people of the territories and the interests and peculiar nature of the territories to be better known in the whole parliament of Canada. While I agree that this could be achieved in other ways, that fact should not negate the necessity and wisdom of pursuing this particular path. That is all we are being asked to do here. We are not being asked to pass judgment on the Senate of Canada, on

[Mr. Clark (Rocky Mountain).]

whether there should be a Senate. We are not even being asked to pass judgment on the practice of institutionalizing the Liberal Party and its political arm in the Senate. We are simply being asked to make that institution, which like this one is supposed to be a national institution, one which is national in fact. I think this is an important initiative and it is one which I intend to support. I regret having to commend the President of the Privy Council for anything, but I commend him for bringing forward this measure and I intend to support it.

Mr. Jack Cullen (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Finance): Madam Speaker, I had not proposed to participate in this debate, but having heard some of the comments I must say that I was impressed in particular with the speech of the hon. member for Edmonton West (Mr. Lambert). I am surprised that the hon. member for Northwest Territories (Mr. Firth) would object to the suggestion that one person from the Northwest Territories and one from the Yukon be appointed as additional members of the Senate. Surely this would provide a voice that is needed for those two parts of the country. I am sure everyone in this House feels there is room for reform of the Senate. I must say that when I first came here, my answer to the Senate was simplistic—abolish it. But I think that as long as we have it, we should find ways to improve it.

An hon. Member: You were right the first time.

Mr. Cullen: The appointments that have been made, and the role taken by the Senate in the six or seven years that I have been here, have given me a new appreciation of the part that the Senate can play. Whether the appointments are political or, as the hon. member for Rocky Mountain (Mr. Clark) has said, are made on the basis of individual talent and ability, I think there is a role for the Senate to play. I do not think anyone would detract from the excellence of the report on the media that was made by that staunch and persuasive Liberal, Senator Keith Davey. There was also Senator Croll's report on poverty which I commend to all hon. members for reading or rereading.

The hon. member for Provencher (Mr. Epp) said that senators would do nothing to bite the hand that feeds them. But, Madam Speaker, they are appointed until they are 75; they do not have to worry about the hand because it has already fed them. They are very independent members in that particular tribunal and are in a position to do something for Canada.

I do not think I am betraying any confidence by saying that I have recommended two individuals, both Liberal, for appointment. Neither has been appointed yet, I might add, but I am sure that if they become members of the Senate they will lose any Liberal bias and become good Canadians.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Cullen: They will be able to ignore the political patronage aspect or feeling. In my experience, Liberals are the people who do most for this country and that is why there are so many in the Senate.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!