

Senator Macquarrie: A few days ago, when Senator Frith was completing his speech, my friend and colleague, Senator MacDonald, from Halifax said that this may be the last speech on Senate reform. I do not know if he was saying that with a sense of regret, but I can assure him that he need not weep any tears. There will be this speech and a great many more on Senate reform. When those parts of the recent communiqué dealing with this subject take visible and legislative form, they will dwell among us for at least six months. Then, if the result of that is not what some desire, 1995 is a long way off for some of us who are septuagenarians. So the subject, Senator MacDonald, will be debated again and again and again. It did not take Senator Frith to say that it is not a new topic, but it has taken on a renewed interest.

● (1710)

We read and heard a lot about Senate reform at the last gathering. We heard that one of the premiers of one of the provinces offered six seats, while another offered two seats and another offered two more seats. Had there been a good NDP there following his ideological views, he might have said, "Take all of mine." And had they gone on a second round, the auction fever might have hit and the solution might have been abolition by auction. But that did not happen.

In all the excitement and congratulations to Premier Peterson, I do not think one person suggested—at least I never read of anyone suggesting—that we had not yet really reached the stage of advancing provincialism in this country to such a degree that a premier alone can dispose of a number of seats in a federal legislature. We have become so provincialized in the last 20 years in this country that that seems not to have struck anyone's attention at all.

The story of the day is the Triple-E Senate. That is supposed to be a western contribution to this continuing study. Actually, the first people who brought it into discussions were from my province, Prince Edward Island, in the 1864 meetings. In 1865 they came out strongly for two of the three "Es"—equality and election. They had in their wisdom decided to make their own upper house elected and they were quite satisfied with that. But alas, there was no agreement. For most of the debates on that subject—and indeed, I must say, on a good many other subjects—they were a minority alone. How great it would have been had that been carried through. Even Senator Phillips would have reached the Senate before he did because we would have had a lot more than a mere four seats. But that did not take place. They got no support from New Brunswick or Nova Scotia.

It seems that the inherent regionalism which is supposed to be so strong did not work at all. Further, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia were not very astute in their own negotiations. To use a naval expression, when it came to the allocation of Senate seats, they were "screwed, blued and tattooed."

There was one colony that was called Canada, but in the confederating process it became two provinces. There were two original and ancient colonies, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia. One might have thought that the formula would be that the same number be given to the two that used to be one,

[Senator MacDonald.]

as it was to each of the Maritimes, but perhaps that would be a bit too much. One might have thought that the provinces of New Brunswick and Nova Scotia, who were absolutely essential to the Confederation process, would have held out for as many seats as were given to Quebec and Ontario.

How we talk about the "regions"—a word that is much overused, in my judgment. We have ended up with one province having 24 seats becoming a region and another with 24 seats also becoming a region. What is left of the eastern end of the country became a region, and it soon became a region with three provinces, not two.

The early criticisms of the Prince Edward Islanders were on the numerical aspect of things, but it did not take long for other criticisms of another kind to come in.

Senator Frith gave us a fine historical lecture the other day. He went back to 1874 or 1875. I wanted to prove that I was more diligent and I discovered that the Senate of Canada was less than two years old before some members of the House of Commons, a Liberal from Ontario, got up and asked Sir John A. Macdonald whether he planned any moves to make the Senate elected or to abolish it. Sir John A. Macdonald certainly put him in his place when he said, "No, we have no such ideas, no such ideas at all."

Then in 1875, which was a bad year for the Senate, a man by the name of Mills stood up in the House of Commons and said that here we have a second chamber which is responsible to nobody, influenced by nobody and which is in no way bound to pay any respect to public opinion or the opinion of that house. "It is as it stands at present an isolated body, an excrescence on our Constitution." He sought support from the House of Commons for the abolition of "a useless and rotten institution from our system."

Senator Frith: Apart from that, how did he like it?

Senator Macquarrie: Of course, he should really have been called to order because the rules would not allow that. If he had gone to a good boys' school, he would have had his mouth washed out with lye soap, or something. But do you know what happened to Mr. Mills? In good time he came into the rotten institution—yes, unreformed and unchanged, and he never spoke that line again. I suppose that comes as no surprise to anyone, and it has happened many times since.

As Senator Frith has done such a good job, my history lesson will be brief. He did the groundwork. In 1887 the provinces got into the act at the meeting held at Quebec, the Dominion-Provincial Conference. There was a terrible bunch of Grits there. They did not like John A. Macdonald's Senate and they did not like his government. Then, in 1893, the Liberal Party had a big convention in Ottawa, not too many furlongs from this very place. They wanted to get back into office and they too thought that Senate reform was a good thing to lure the voters to their side. They promised Senate reform. They got into office three years later and stayed in office for 15 years. The only Senate reform that you could really say came about was the appointment of 80 Liberals.