

*Private Members' Business*

There could be some special considerations on the basis of which one part of the country would be better represented than another part, there is the historical aspect, there is the cultural aspect and there are all kinds of considerations, but I do not see why, considering the present state of Canadian culture or Canadian politics, Prince Edward Island would have the same number of senators as Ontario. It would be interesting to see some evidence that this would be better than what we have now.

The concept of an equal Senate takes us back to the Constitution of 1982, in other words, Canada as checker board, a vast country divided into ten parts, with each part being equal to the other. That is what we saw and that is what we see now, to a certain extent under the current amending formula for the Canadian constitution, and I think that if we consider the effectiveness of this mechanism, we may have some reservations about giving certain parts of the country so much power that they could easily obstruct the operations of our institutions.

I am referring to the potential power of entities that may represent as few as 300,000 people out of Canada's total population of 28 or 29 million, so I do not think that today's proposal for an equal Senate is in the interests of Canada and Quebec.

• (1355)

And now, let me deal with the concept of an effective Senate. When the hon. member for the Reform Party introduced her bill, she made a connection between effectiveness and the Senate's power to obstruct, to hold up legislation passed by the House of Commons. I think there is something a little dangerous in all this. It would mean having a Senate that would obstruct the will of the representatives of the people. Two, three or four hundred years ago, the people in the Commons were not always considered to be sufficiently intelligent, knowledgeable or enlightened to debate the real problems, so people were appointed to block their decisions.

Today, however, if we look at countries with only one house, we can see that democracy functions effectively and well there. In Quebec and Ontario there is no longer a second appointed house, and democratic institutions are functioning well. So I do not think we need a second house to block the democratic will of the representatives of the people, as is currently the case.

Reference was made to the gun control bill. It is totally unacceptable, in my opinion, for appointed senators to be able to block legislation passed by a large majority of the representatives of the people. I see it as dangerous for democracy in Canada when people who have not been elected are given the power to prevent the will of the people's representatives from being effectively expressed in the administration of the country.

Therefore, we in the Bloc oppose the motion. The motion is not a votable item, but if it were, we would vote against it, particularly because we have repeatedly called in the House for the abolition of the Senate. We consider the present Senate ineffective. We consider it too costly. According to the budget, the Senate will cost Canada \$42 million this year. The services the Senate currently provides have a certain value. However, in comparing their cost with the Senate's potential influence, its effect, if it were operating at maximum capability, I think that, right now, the \$42 million spent on the Senate is too much, given the needs and the cuts being made in various areas, where there are desperate needs.

We are calling for its abolition, particularly because we have no hope or expectation of its being reformed. It is impossible. With the Canadian constitution as it currently stands, if we look at sections 38 and 42 of the constitution, we see that Senate approval is required to amend the powers, role, election and appointment of senators in Canada.

So, from what I understand of the way the institution works, I do not think the senators would go so far as to commit hara-kiri. So, I think the only way to abolish the Senate is along the lines of the motion I made in connection with the bill to implement certain elements of the latest budget. It would simply be a matter of cutting off the Senate, of arranging for senators not to be paid anymore, of abolishing the funds needed to operate the Senate so that the Senate dies on its own. With the state of Canada's constitution and the way institutions work, it is beyond reform, it is ineffective, it is not elected, and the powers currently in its hands serve more to hamper the flow of democracy in Canada than to help Canadians live better in this country.

• (1400)

[English]

**Mr. Gouk:** Mr. Speaker, there were some very interesting comments made by the hon. member from the Bloc.

**The Deputy Speaker:** The Chair received no indication that anybody on the government side wished to speak. The Chair has not seen anybody on the government side stand. However there is a rotation and we have heard from one member of the Reform Party. Therefore the hon. parliamentary secretary to the government House leader has the floor.

**Mr. Peter Milliken (Parliamentary Secretary to Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I am sorry to interrupt the hon. member. I know I would enjoy hearing his remarks, but I think in terms of the normal rotation of speakers among the parties that a government member should participate in this debate at some point.