

Supply

first question in a poll in 1944, the predecessor of the NDP, the CCF, was calling for the abolition of the Senate since 1933.

This is the longstanding position of our party with respect to the Senate and the effrontery over the decades at having an appointed body in the centre of our democratic decision making process. I have certainly found it very difficult on occasion to explain Canadian senators when I have been in other countries with them. They tend to be treated as if they are American senators. Everybody sort of oohs and ahs when they hear that someone is a senator. We have to take them aside and explain that they are not like American senators who get elected every six years, that these people are appointed for life and are thereafter untouchable except by the good Lord himself. It is something that most banana republics would not tolerate, the idea of having a body like this one appointed basically for life or until age 75.

I wanted to say that we agree with the notion that the Senate should be abolished. It is certainly something that has been on the Canadian political table for a long time, long before the Bloc Quebecois came along. We have been open in recent years as to how the Senate might be reinvented on a more democratic basis to deal with some of the political problems that the country has experienced, and we continue to be open to that.

As for the existing Senate, that appointed body, we continually take the same offence at it that we have historically taken. We therefore agree with the thrust of the motion to do away with the current Senate.

[Translation]

Mr. Pélouquin: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for reminding me that his party and others before already debated the idea of the Canadian government abolishing the Senate.

I would just like to make a short remark here, Mr. Speaker, if you allow me. I wonder why this state of affairs exists. We members of the House of Commons are asked to tighten our belts, cut our budgets and act like good representatives of the people. Members of this House travel economy class, you realize. The representatives of the other House always travel business class. Members of this House refused, with the consent of the Chair, which you represent, to continue accumulating frequent flyer points. All that was eliminated.

• (1840)

However, members of the other House continue to use those points, which are a bonus. So I ask why members of the other House have special privileges that are better than ours, when we are just asked to cut the fat.

Mr. Gilbert Fillion (Chicoutimi): Mr. Speaker, I think today's debate is most important since we are addressing the issue of the other place.

Today's economic environment does not allow us to take for granted the amounts allocated to the Upper House, especially since we in the Bloc Quebecois have been defending, since the beginning of the session the entitlements of the most disadvantaged in our society. Given the difficult situation now faced by the people, that is, the insecurity and unemployment—there is 14 per cent unemployment in my riding—how can one support allocating money to the Senate, when all sectors are facing cutbacks? How can one justify the money spent on the other place with its 104 members?

If I may, Mr. Speaker, I would like to give a few examples. Last year, the Senate paid a total of \$125,000 for a new hall with mahogany and granite panels.

An hon. member: That is not cheap!

Mr. Fillion: The Senate only sat 47 days last year but it employs stenographers. Even when it is not sitting—and I will let you draw your own conclusions—these stenographers still get paid. They do not even have to show up at work. Some of them even fill their free time by offering their services to other firms, thus receiving two salaries. The total bill for taxpayers comes to \$1.6 million.

The senators also have their own \$29,000 fitness centre when there are schools in dire need of such facilities. Yet only one senator uses the centre on a regular basis.

Between February and May 1993, the Upper House met for six days in February, 10 days in March, five days in April and eight days in May for a total of 29 days in four months. At least one day out of two, 17 senators or more were absent. They can miss 21 days a year without penalty. After that, they must pay \$60 for every day they miss. It is totally ridiculous.

They also have their own furniture store. Eleven people—carpenters, cabinetmakers and even a professional framer—work there. As far as communications are concerned, each senator claims on average \$10,000 per year in telephone charges. All these examples show how public funds are spent.

• (1845)

We are not talking about individuals democratically elected by the population. No, senators enjoy privileges without being accountable.

The existence of the Senate generates costs which Canadian and Quebec taxpayers can question in this difficult economic period, a period during which the government is targeting social programs. In that context costs related to the Senate have very little to do with the daily reality of Canadians and Quebecers.

People take an interest in the Senate because it generates costs, not because it plays a proactive role. It is the elected members who have democratic legitimacy. The public would not tolerate that a non-elected House, with members appointed by the central government, playing an interventionist role. Senators represent neither the population, nor the provincial