

Tenure of Senators

base we have seen in the last two parliaments does not represent the regions of the country.

The question comes back to the structure of federalism—how we are going to bring about a structure which strengthens the regions and allows more bottom-up input into the federal structure instead of talk-down direction. As long as we have this strengthening of talk-down direction, or this strengthening of centralism, we will have more and more ruptures.

This is a massive land. Canada is the envy of the world in terms of its land, its resources, its people, its educational system and its health services' system. We are the envy of the world.

We have a good working spirit. I would like to see us put legislation in place which would enhance that working spirit rather than dampen it. But I think we will have to talk about an upper house with an elected senate having incentives strong enough to attract the very best minds which the regions can deliver. We will have to think about giving rewards to those people who are prepared to dedicate their intellectual talents to the betterment of the country and, somehow or other, allow them some tenure upon election to the Senate. If we are to have regionalism, we must get the Senate away from political appointments. The Canadian Senate is letting the nation down because it is overloaded politically. It does not have a political balance. The Leader of the Senate has expressed that as a genuine concern to me and to others. If it is an elected Senate, then it truly represents the regions and the rewards and qualifications of running for the Senate should set a very high standard so that the regions are represented well.

But we have regionalism within regions as well. We have to address that if we are to be a happy, strong land and if the people in the faraway places of Canada are to feel that they and their interests are truly represented here.

My colleague, the hon. member for Cariboo-Chilcotin (Mr. Greenaway) spoke during question period today about one of the largest Indian reserves in Canada which suffered massive damage as a result of a flood. The Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development which has a horrendous budget of something like \$.7 million and a large staff, has not even sent anyone out to look after the Indians who are in real dire trouble. This causes alienation and antagonism and the centre is not serving the whole. If we had a stronger upper house which represented the regions, we would have had somebody out there immediately. I acknowledge that the leader in the Senate, Senator Perrault, went out to that flood area, but the Indian reserve was totally overlooked. The department at the centre did not telegraph a concern into that region.

● (1630)

All of us want this country to stay together. We want to be proud of it, and we want it to be strong. However, that will not come about with top-down direction from the centre. We have to gather in the parts and make it look as if it is bottom-up in terms of creation of a federal structure here. The Senate is essential to it.

I do not agree with those who say that the Senate should just be a vehicle for a second look. If the Senate is truly going to represent the regions of this country, it will have to be a strong organization. It will require muscle in terms of western resources and will need to have fingers out to the multicultural and racial groups in this country so that we can keep the dialogue going and resolve the pockets of friction. It will not serve this country if it is just a vehicle for a second look, to be overruled in six months and have its work returned here.

If the Senate is going to be strong, it should have the full power of veto over legislation which passes through this House. If you want to continue the growth of alienation in this country, just have the population blocks at the centre of this country continue to tell the outbacks how to live, work and manage and control their resources. That will cause nothing but resentment.

I sit here as a very frustrated person because I like to be positive. Sitting in the opposition, I do not get a chance to be as positive as I was born to be. This kind of frustration should be addressed because all of us are here to serve, and we are here as a result of our love for this country.

When Bill C-303 comes forward to amend the British North America Act for the Senate, we should be talking about strengthening the upper house so that we can really address regionalism, which is the anchor of dissent that exists in this country. We should consider facts such as the fact that I come from a region where there are 11 federal boards upon which there are no citizens of British Columbia. I make an appeal in these few minutes to try to bring about an awareness of the anxieties which exist and the challenge that we as elected members of Parliament have to address this problem.

It is hard for those at the centre of Canada to get the gut feeling that exists across the prairies, in the north and in British Columbia. We pay 130 to 165 per cent of world prices for our consumer and capital goods for the benefit of payrolls and industries at the centre of this country. We are a customs union and we accept that. However, we want at least 75 per cent or better of world prices for the delivery of resources from the outback.

If you think that central Canada can keep this country together by imposing what is considered to be a plunder of our heritage, it is not going to happen. The country will disintegrate. It is in this federal structure we can talk this out. I think it is beyond politics now. We have to talk it out as Canadians representing our regions, getting our concerns out on a full-time basis. There is nothing more important than talking about a resolution on regionalism, a way in which western Canada can sit as an equal at the table, with Ontario, Quebec and the Atlantic region.

We should have a full input into the departmental decision-making process. When talking about immigration, western Canada should have its representative for immigration sitting with the immigration minister at the council table so that the problems of that region as a result of immigration can be considered.