

According to a publication of the British Parliament, statistics kept by the Information Office of the House of Lords for the year 1977-78 indicate the following breakdown of work accomplished by the House of Lords:

about 50 per cent of its time, concerns Public Bills.

Most of the time spent on legislation is spent on revising Bills sent from the Commons, and because of its legal tradition, the House of Lords can do a great deal of tidying up in a detached and rather professional way. About 30 per cent of its time, the Lords spends debating reports and general subjects, often far-reaching debates on subjects such as the environment or leisure, and they are usually debated in a measured and well-informed way. It is a pity that the House of Lords debates are so seldom used as a source of information in view of the wisdom and experience concentrated there, which comes across without political venom and often with courteous eccentricity. Unstarred Questions, which come at the end of the day, are like short Adjournment Debates in the Commons and take up about 9 per cent of their Lordships' time. Finally, there are the debates on the reports of the House of Lords European Communities Committee, which has formed seven specialist sub-committees, is manned by about 90 Peers, and is able to devote far more time to the subject than the equivalent House of Commons Select Committee. The House of Lords itself spends nearly 5 per cent of its time debating the European Committee's reports, far more time than the House of Commons can afford. The more important statements made in the House of Commons are usually repeated in the House of Lords.

Honourable senators, I would also point out that, according to the same information, the number of oral questions at daily question time in the Lords is limited to only four, each question taking eight to ten minutes. The total time devoted to the Question Period is about half an hour, sometimes 45 minutes. They call that Fast Business. Honourable senators, the Question Period in the Senate today lasted not more than 40 minutes, so we are not doing too badly.

**Senator Doody:** It depends on where you sit.

**Hon. D. G. Steuart:** And when you sit.

**Senator Thompson:** How do they select the four questions to be asked?

**Senator Riel:** I am afraid I do not know the answer to the honourable senator's question.

The cross-benchers act as the real opposition in the House of Lords because they have the strength of numbers, with at least 50 cross-benchers sitting every day. The total number of lords in attendance on any given day is not more than 200 and probably more likely to be 150. The activity is focussed in the cross-benchers' corner and, as I understand it, that is welcomed.

Honourable senators, while I was imbibing all this information about party organization, discipline, parliamentary manners and work in the House of Lords, I could not help but admire the performance of that body. If we kept statistics, we

[Senator Riel.]

could judge whether we rated as well. Honourable senators, I am sure we would.

An article in *The Economist* of June 16, 1984, circulated to us by Senators Bell and Gigantès, bears the very interesting title, "Britain's House of Lords now out-performs the Commons as a responsible legislature." It is worthwhile reading.

This good work and reputation is not all due to the cross-benchers, but, nevertheless, I believe it would be a positive step if we were to appoint more independents to the Senate. In this chamber we have three independents: Senators Molson, Pitfield and Lawson. I do not know if we can judge the weight of their influence, but I would suggest that they do have some. I believe that, if we had a larger group of cross-benchers, we would be making progress.

Honourable senators, several months ago I conveyed an idea I had to Senator Le Moyné. It was that we should create a special group of senators to be appointed *ex officio* to the Senate, this group being made up of all the former prime ministers of Canada, all the former premiers of the provinces and all the former governors general.

• (1530)

The number of senators would not exceed the 104 or 112 that can be appointed according to the Constitution. The distinguished citizens belonging to the group would become, as I said, *ex officio* members of the Senate on their retirement from office, if they so wished, by informing the Clerk of the Senate of their readiness and acquiescence.

[Translation]

**Senator Jacques Flynn:** Up to what age?

**Senator Riel:** According to the Standing Orders. We are limited to age 75 by the Constitution of the land. We have a former Governor General who is hardly 50.

**Senator Flynn:** Another one is 80!

**Senator Riel:** We have in Newfoundland a former premier who is well above 80. There should be limits.

**Senator Flynn:** I thought you wanted no age limit for those people.

**Senator Riel:** No. As you know, I always support sensible measures.

[English]

They would have only to present a certificate from the Clerk of the Assembly of their province to the effect that they have ceased to occupy the function of premier and are no longer sitting members of a house. They would need no summons from the Prime Minister of Canada, whoever he might be, and would not owe their appointments to any one political party. They would be free to be perfectly independent of the parties, and could render to this country invaluable services in bringing to this place of sober second thought their experience, wisdom and intellectual powers. If ever they should wish to return to elected politics, they would have to resign.

Honourable senators, think of it: We could have Ed Schreyer, former Governor General, Pierre Elliott Trudeau and Joe