

Supply

our Constitution the Senate has the power, as the motion states, to defeat any bill coming from the House of Commons. The answer to that question is, yes, the Constitution does give that power to the Senate.

But that is not the end of the issue, as the minister pointed out. Unfortunately, to the NDP that does seem to be the end of the issue. Let me tell him and the other members of the NDP that our Constitution needs to be updated. It needs to be updated in more ways than one and in more places than one. If he would care to pay some attention to the national debate that is going on in the country, nowhere is there more dissatisfaction than there is with the place of the Senate in the Constitution of Canada. We want to do something about that.

As I mentioned, while we are sitting here, the constitutional impasse which is labelled "Meech Lake" may be working itself out. If I can give some more news to the NDP, one of the great benefits is that then we may be able to do something to reform the Senate. We may be able to make out of it an institution which a democracy will recognize as having a legitimate function that it can exercise.

It is in an awkward situation now because, unlike a lot of anachronisms, this anachronism is a living organism. It is an organ of Parliament. It is composed of well-meaning Canadian citizens determined to do their duty for their country, hidebound somewhat by the inappropriate amount of power that is awarded to them under this anachronistic and hopefully soon to be revised constitutional aspect of Canada.

I have had the pleasure of being a member of Parliament during the time when our party was in power and in control of the Senate by having a majority of members of the Senate also of our party. I have also served in this period when we are in the Opposition in this party but in the majority in the Upper House.

That exercise of constitutional rights of the Senate, under those circumstances, in every case and on a wall to wall basis of agreement with what the Opposition in the Lower House would like would defy a basic requirement of a democracy.

I do not like to admit it with members of the Conservative party present in the room, but the Liberals were defeated in the last election. I see nods of agreement. We were defeated in the election of 1984. It is very important that that be recognized in the way that Parliament operates.

Members of the NDP say that the Liberal party, in spite of having been defeated in 1984 and in 1988, has this anachronistic, constitutional power to defeat any bill coming from the House of Commons, and that we should do it or else we are not being true to our principles. Our basic principle is democracy. We have to accept the will of the people.

Mr. Harvey (Edmonton East): Like with the UI bill in the Senate right now?

Mr. Kaplan: I want to make two more brief points and then I will be very happy to have questions from my hon. friend.

My first point is how can we operate in those circumstances where the majority of members are Liberals, where they do not agree with the GST, the free trade agreement, or with a government which is trying more and more to eliminate the middle class and to divide Canadians into a two-Canada idea of a rich powerful centre tied very closely to the United States to the exclusion of the rest of the world and the regions of the country which are to be, in its way of looking at it, a source of population flows into the greater populated areas of our country. That is its vision. It is proud of it. It has people in the country who support it and who help it to achieve those objectives. We do not. It is not for the Senate, although controlled by a majority of Liberal members, to contradict the result of the last election.

• (1630)

I did not vote Conservative in 1984 and I did not vote Conservative in 1988. But, enough Canadians did vote Conservative to put this House under the authority of that party. In the Senate, where there are a majority of Liberal members, I think they have been very creative, very respectful of the democracy which is Canada, and I think they have achieved a lot. They have spoken as an Upper House in a federal system should for those who are not fairly represented by the basic application of one person, one vote. They have spoken for depopulating regions of our country where industries are being pulled out by the government, or are being pulled out by the operation of the so-called free market established under the free trade agreement. They have spoken for the