Private Members' Business

between three. The present representation favours central Canada and is unfair.

Do we need 104 senators? No, we do not. Can we lower the numbers? Yes, we can if the will of the Canadian people decides so. Now that senators are no longer elected for life and leave the Senate at 75 years of age, it is opportune to look at the less cost involved in fewer senators and the fact that absenteeism should be a less serious problem than it was in the past. An equal number of seats from each province suggests a fairer representation.

Should the two most populated provinces with the most MPs in the House of Commons also have the most senators in the Senate? No. This policy is unfair for the less populated areas of our vast country.

To be effective the Senate must have adequate power to balance the House of Commons. We do not believe that defeat of a government bill in the Senate should lead to the resignation of the government. However when we are fine tuning the powers of this Chamber we must ensure that the Senate can amend or veto regionally offensive legislation.

In conclusion, the adoption of an elected, equal and effective second chamber in Canada's central Parliament would be of great benefit to our political system. Through equality the interests of small provinces would be protected. With the combination of elected and effective, senators would have the legitimacy to act, to amend or to defeat legislation which did not respect regional differences in the country.

It would also combine the best aspects of the present Senate, its scrutiny of legislation, with the legitimacy to act to defend regional interests.

I realize as with all proposals there is some fine tuning to do. Ways must be found to ensure elected senators do not act to slavishly serve the interests of the political party they represent. They must have the freedom to represent their regions even if the interests of the region do not coincide with the interests of the national political party they represent.

However these are details and we can work them out if we get the fundamentals right, an elected, effective and equal Senate.

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Caron (Jonquière, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak on behalf of the Bloc Quebecois on the motion by my colleague, the hon. member for Mission–Coquitlam, which reads as follows:

> That, in the opinion of this House, representation in the Senate should be equal from each province, elected by the people, and have sufficient power to make it effective in order to better represent the people of the less populous provinces.

This will be recognized as the proposal for the triple E Senate, that is elected, equal and effective.

Let me state right at the onset that I am going to oppose this motion and I shall close my remarks with what it leads me to conclude about the present Senate.

● (1350)

First, I want to deal with the concept of an elected Senate. To start with, obviously, we know that the Senate is one of the two Houses in this country. A number of countries have two houses, the USA and France, for instance.

What sets the second chamber apart in Canada, as in England, is that it is not elected, in other words the members are appointed. The Senate we have is an elitist Senate, an aristocratic Senate, one that is not accountable. Often its appointees are men or women who have had a long career in politics, or business leaders who backed a given political party, or party organizers who find in the Senate the income and means to allow them to continue to serve their party.

The Senate in its present form is an extremely negative aspect of our democracy. When reference is made to an elected Senate, I think that most people who want to have a Senate, to retain the Senate, would agree that in the current political situation and in response to current views on democracy, the Senate ought to be elected.

Now, for the concept of an equal Senate. From what I have been able to understand, each province would have the same number of senators, like the U.S. Senate. I think some people here either watch too much American television or are at least very much aware of the American philosophy and would like to see in Canada people with the same power as American senators. When we look at American history and the process by which every State large and small, was given the same number of senators, we see that at the time the political philosophy was such that people wanted to create a certain equality between the States by having the same number of senators from each State.

However, that was in the 18th century, and we are in the 20th century. I think that in the 20th century, people do not look kindly on the fact that states or provinces with a population that is relatively low compared with the more densely populated provinces, and I personally and the people of the Bloc as well do not look kindly on the fact that some provinces are given so much power, considering their low population numbers.

If we look at the current system in Canada, each province is represented in the House of Commons, according to a certain ratio that is used to determine proportional representation. I think that considering the present state of democratic thinking, people are well represented.