

Suggested Senate Reform

To abolish an abuse or cure a malpractice is reforming, but if we were talking about a church, for example, we would not talk of reforming the church by abolishing it.

Mr. Macdonnell: Mr. Speaker, you are making a finer distinction than I proposed doing. I confess when I read the words "abolish, cure", though it is true they refer to malpractice and abuses, it struck me the word "reform" meant what the hon. member for Rosetown-Biggart suggested, though I was not at all sure whether the hon. member would include the Senate in one of the above categories from the way he spoke.

At any rate, Mr. Speaker, I accept your correction if you are indeed correcting me. I was a little afraid myself, because although I am very ready indeed to be reformed I hoped it would not have to be fatal. That was the thought that struck me when I read this definition of the word used by the hon. member for Rosetown-Biggart. At any rate, Mr. Speaker, I have learned something and perhaps you have too.

On that point I would just like to make one more comment because it seems to me that what the hon. member for Rosetown-Biggart suggested by reform, namely to abolish, should be entirely out of our contemplation, because it appears to me it would be a gross breach of faith and it would certainly be quite different from an ordinary amendment to the constitution. In order to support that, I wish to read very briefly what Sir Wilfrid Laurier had to say on this point, as reported in column 2301 of *Hansard* for 1906:

But one consideration which, to my mind, is absolutely conclusive and paramount, is that under our system of government, a second chamber is an absolutely needed safeguard for the smaller provinces against a possible invasion of their rights by the larger provinces.

This is really the same point which the Leader of the Opposition brought out in his quotation from Sir John Macdonald.

I would like to quote from the same speech by Sir Wilfrid Laurier where a little later on he states:

This principle having been adopted admittedly for the protection of the smaller provinces, every one will admit at once that if we were to remove that safeguard, there would be a natural discontent in the smaller provinces, so that I contend that we cannot seriously entertain, even for a moment, the idea of ever abolishing our Senate.

To come back to what I said at the outset, I think it is a bad situation when we have one branch of our government—and that a branch which in the past has been extremely useful at times—almost brought into contempt with a large number of people. As a matter of fact, many people who seem to give practically no consideration to other aspects of

[Mr. Speaker.]

our constitution are quite ready to sound off in no uncertain way about the Senate. Why has that situation come about? It seems to me it has come about because the Senate has fared very ill at the hands of Mr. King, and I very much regret to say that it has fared just as ill at the hands of our present Prime Minister. (Mr. St. Laurent).

I want to read just a word or two or rather a statement made by Mr. King in 1926, as reported at page 4030 of *Hansard* of June 4, 1926. In reply to Mr. Meighen Mr. King said:

I might say to my right hon. friend that the government would not like to prolong the session unduly by introducing the subject of Senate reform at this stage. My right hon. friend may be sure it will come up in due course.

One does not know what "in due course" is. I suppose, with a man of Mr. King's beliefs, it might be going on even yet. At any rate, I raise that point. I think anyone looking at the Senate under the hands of our present Prime Minister would feel that it is "the mixture as before", or the same procedure which personally I deeply regret. I regret most of all what the Prime Minister said on February 1 in this house, because it seemed to me that he had set aside reform of the Senate as something which, at any rate, was not going to be practical in his day. If I understood correctly what he said to the young Liberals the day before yesterday—although it was not about Senate reform; at least I think not—he seemed again to be putting off things there also in a way which I think was unfortunate. I want to read what the Prime Minister said because, as I heard it, I remember feeling "That is a minor disaster to our system of government". As reported in *Hansard* of February 1, 1954, page 1639, the Prime Minister said:

Since I have been in Ottawa I have found that there were plenty of problems that it was realistic to study and consider because I might have some responsibility in connection with forming some opinions as to the solutions they should receive. I must confess I have never felt I was going to have in my day the responsibility of having to come to a conclusion about substantial modification as to the character of our constitution.

I have heard certain modifications suggested about the way in which appointments or summonses to the other house might be made. But quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, I have never heard one that did not seem to me to bristle with more obstacles than promises of advantage to the Canadian public.

I am not proposing to make suggestions as to how the constitution is reformed. I might make the obvious comment that there is one thing that the Prime Minister could have done, although I must admit that it would have been contrary to the general practice followed by those before him. What he might have done is to disregard what I am afraid has been the inflexible rule that appointments