

Am I to understand that the tabling of the report is being postponed or is it just a matter of saying that, if the Senate is not sitting when the report is tabled, the Committee's report will be deposited with the Clerk of the Senate, and if the Senate adjourns before then, we should not, in any case, wait for the production of this document?

Will how you table this report depend on whether the Senate is sitting?

Senator Beaudoin: Exactly, Senator Frith.

If we are sitting, we will follow the usual procedure, and if we are not, we will deposit the report today with the Clerk of the Senate.

Senator Frith: You are not asking us to wait for the report.

Senator Beaudoin: Well, I will leave that up to the Leader of the Government in the Senate. If the Senate is prepared to wait, the report will certainly be tabled some time today.

Senator Frith: I suppose you don't know how long it will take?

Senator Beaudoin: No, I don't, Senator Frith.

We are negotiating, and I know the Senate is supposed to adjourn around 12.30 p.m. There is every indication it will take longer than that.

If we don't get here in time, we will deposit the report with the Clerk of the Senate. It really makes no difference. As you say, it is just a formality, whether we table the report while the Senate is sitting or afterwards.

Senator Frith: It all depends on whether we are sitting or not?

Senator Beaudoin: Exactly.

Senator Frith: I understand.

Hon. Lowell Murray (Leader of the Government in the Senate): Honourable senators, we will have a royal assent around one o'clock this afternoon. It is unlikely that the proceedings will be so lengthy or that there would be any items on the Order Paper that would keep us after one o'clock this afternoon.

[English]

SENATE REFORM

MOTION TO APPROVE THE PRINCIPLE OF AN ELECTED SENATE
CONSIDERED IN COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

On the Order:

The Senate again in Committee of the Whole on the motion of the Honourable Senator Molgat, seconded by the Honourable Senator Hébert:

That the Senate of Canada agrees with the principle that the Senate be reformed, by making it an elected body with sufficient membership and power to effectively represent the people of Canada in all regions of our land.

The Senate was accordingly adjourned during pleasure and put into a Committee of the Whole on the motion, the Honourable Brenda M. Robertson in the Chair.

[Senator Frith.]

The Chairman: Honourable senators, I understand Senator David is prepared to proceed.

[Translation]

Hon. Paul David: Madam Chairman, honourable senators, Senate reform has been an issue for many years and so far there has been no real consensus on any proposal.

We may, however, presume that both extreme options, namely the status quo and abolishing the Senate, will be rejected by the Beaudoin-Dobbie Special Joint Committee. In view of the pressure exerted by several western provinces, Newfoundland and the public at large, except in Quebec, the option of an elected Senate will probably be adopted by the Joint Committee. This option would be a positive response to your motion, Senator Molgat.

As a Canadian and a Quebecer, I wonder about the advantages of such an approach, for reasons that I will explain to you briefly. I know very well that I am going against the current, but I am giving you a strictly personal opinion.

I share the opinion of several of my colleagues that an elected upper house cannot alone resolve the constitutional crisis and the problem of regional disparities in this country. It is illusory to believe that such a Senate would cure all our ills.

I even wonder whether the hoped-for advantages would not be compromised by the many disadvantages that I personally anticipate.

The basic question which I, like you, am trying to answer is: What is the Senate for and whom must it serve?

In 1865, John A. Macdonald put it this way:

The Senate must be an independent chamber, free to act as it sees fit, for its true value lies in being a moderating body that calmly examines legislation proposed by the people's assembly and refuses any hastily or poorly considered legislation that may be presented to it, but it will never obstruct the carefully considered and reasonable desires of the people.

This concept of the appointed Senate thus refers to an independent, moderating, wise body that does not obstruct the carefully considered and reasonable desires of the people, who, in this description, are represented by the elected members in the House of Commons.

If we still want to assign such a purpose to the Upper House, the Senate must complement, and not compete with, the House of Commons. The Senate must be independent of the House of Commons and therefore it must necessarily be non-partisan or almost non-partisan.

The other purpose that the Fathers of Confederation wanted the Senate to fulfil was to defend the interests of the regions, by giving them all the same number of representatives. Today, people are advocating not only that senators be elected but also that there be the same number from each province.

Curiously enough, for this newly elected house, they advocate limiting the powers which are now held by the appointed senators. Also, they hope that its democratic legitimacy will make it more effective.