

think, is a most revealing answer. I would conclude that, at this point, it is exploratory and that there is a general conversation, but that is something we can determine later on.

What is clear now is that the Leader of the Government cannot tell us whether the government itself has decided on proposals with respect to changes to the Senate.

What I want to ask him is based upon a statement attributed in the press to Senator Murray, in which he said that Progressive Conservative senators had conversations with the Minister of Justice in which were disclosed the options the government had in mind. If it is possible for the Minister of Justice to tell his Tory colleagues in the Senate what he has in mind, surely the Leader of the Government can do us the courtesy of telling us what he has learned from the Minister of Justice.

Senator Roblin: I think Senator Murray will have to be responsible for his own statements. I was not aware of the statement. I know not what prompted it. Since I cannot speak for him, I think we will have to ask Senator Murray for his interpretation.

As a former member of the cabinet, my honourable friend knows that it is not possible for me to go further in discussing what the government proposals or options are in this respect.

Senator MacEachen: I have deliberately not asked the Leader of the Government for the content of whatever was transmitted to the provinces. I will not ask that.

However, I think it is not unfair to ask whether concrete, specific proposals agreed to by the government have been submitted to the provinces. I have not received an answer to that. That, as I said earlier, is quite revealing.

I want to ask the Leader of the Government another question related to the frequent references made by the media, presumably based upon sources within the government, that proposed changes to the Senate of Canada would be based upon the Parliament Act passed in the United Kingdom. I wonder whether that is in the mind of the government. In considering changes, have they—I am sure they have—reflected upon the idea that Britain is a unitary state and that the House of Lords is a body of peers, while Canada is a federal state and the Senate is intended to represent the regions, and that therefore what may be appropriate in the United Kingdom, may not be appropriate as a pure transplant to the Canadian scene? Therefore, I ask the Leader of the Government whether there is validity in the frequent references made in the media that the government is proceeding on a British model.

● (1500)

Senator Roblin: I wish to come back to the first point. It should be clear that if you go into a negotiating session with a very firm view as to what should be done, with no room to manoeuvre, it really is not negotiation. So whatever firm ideas the government may have with respect to this matter, I am sure that they are subject to influence by what the provinces think about them when they hear them. I believe that is a reasonable and natural situation to be facing.

I quite agree with my honourable friend that the Senate is not the House of Lords, that it is constituted for an entirely different reason. Its history is different, and there is no reason to think that what is good for the House of Lords will be good for the Senate. So I can give no credence to those speculations with respect to a comparison between the House of Lords and the Senate, except to say that there are certain superficial resemblances, but in terms of the constitutional necessities in Canada, the two situations are quite different.

Senator MacEachen: Honourable senators, I thank the Leader of the Government for his answer on that point. I wish to refer to a section of his statement in which he said that consultations would be undertaken with representatives in the House of Commons and the Senate. I noticed that yesterday the government house leader in the other place, the Honourable Ray Hnatyshyn, stated that when consultations and discussions had been completed with the provinces, then consultations would be held with party leaders—presumably the leader of the Liberal Party and the leader of the New Democratic Party in the House of Commons—and that the resolution that emerged as a result of those consultations would be discussed by the party leaders in the House of Commons. I am not drawing from his statement conclusions that are unwarranted, because he did refer to discussion of a resolution with the party leaders in the House of Commons.

I welcome the comment made by the Leader of the Government that he is prepared to have appropriate consultations with the members of the Senate, and I wonder what mechanism he has in mind for undertaking such a discussion of proposals, and whether indeed we will have a draft resolution to consider before any such resolution is introduced in either house.

Senator Roblin: Honourable senators, my answer is more speculative than is usual in these matters, because I would envisage an opportunity for the general proposition, whatever it may be, to be discussed in the Senate in perhaps several ways. It could be discussed between the leaders of the parties, who could then discuss it with their caucuses. But what I am sure about is that ultimately the resolution will be discussed by the whole Senate and that every member of the Senate will have an opportunity to speak, if he or she wishes, and to make any contribution that he or she considers useful to the resolution of the matter. I may be an optimist, but I have heard some statements made by members of this chamber that would lead me to believe that the idea of reform is not repugnant to everyone, and in that observation I include members on the other side of the house. I believe that this house would be willing to consider some reforms in its method of operation or in its structure. I hope—and I hope I am not too optimistic—that if we have a consensus from the provinces—which I believe is a necessary first step, because we cannot get anywhere without that, and we know what the rules are for that—and if there is an agreement to that extent, then the agreement of Parliament itself comes into play. So far as the Senate is concerned, I would like to have the most open discussion and consultations possible on the matter. It need not be any