

The Senate

senators in the other place, I asked myself what full representation in that place would be for the western provinces. On a rough calculation, based on the 1971 census and on the same population ratio as New Brunswick, I found that British Columbia would have 34 senators, Alberta 25 senators, Saskatchewan 14 senators, and Manitoba 14 senators, making a total of 87. When I hear the hon. member for Yukon and his colleagues in the Conservative Party suggesting that there should be 87 senators from the four western provinces, then I will begin to think they are doing something more than speaking tongue in cheek about full representation.

I thought I would like to take part in this debate briefly to make clear that so far as I am concerned, the hon. member who tonight has shown the soundest common sense in stating the needs and the interests of the people of the Northwest Territories and the territory represented by the would-be senator for the Yukon is my colleague, the hon. member for Northwest Territories (Mr. Firth). He put this whole matter into perspective when he suggested that it is not wasting more than five minutes of the time of the House to say: a plague on the whole idea.

Mr. John M. Reid (Parliamentary Secretary to President of the Privy Council): Mr. Speaker, I listened with a great deal of interest to some of the speeches that have been made this evening concerning the provision in this bill for senate representation for the Northwest Territories and the Yukon. I think that there is a fundamental point at issue here which members of the NDP who have spoken against the legislation do not seem to understand. If you wish to have a region which is as isolated as the Northwest Territories or the Yukon brought into the full stream of public politics of your country, it seems to me you must provide adequate access to all institutions of your government.

The Senate, whether or not the NDP likes to admit it, is part of the government of Canada. Senators are members of parliament. In spite of the fact that my friends are huffing and puffing and threatening to blow the house down, the Senate is there and is likely to outlast the NDP as a political force in this country. Furthermore, even when the House of Commons and the Senate had a joint special committee to look into the constitution of Canada, one of the things that was most surprising of all was that there was very little criticism of the Senate, and indeed there was a multitude of proposals not to weaken the Senate or do away with it but to strengthen it and make it a more powerful force in Canadian politics. As a result of some of the recommendations which were made by that committee and other hon. members who have put forward bills from time to time, the government has decided to implement the recommendation to provide Senate representation for the Yukon and Northwest Territories.

The first point I started out to make was that you have to provide adequate access to the instruments of government, the Senate being one of them. Far more important, or as important to me as the question of adequate representation, is presence by the residents of the north in the civil service of Canada. One of the things that concerns me is that if any particular region is to be properly represented at all levels of the decision-making process, it must have representatives in all the facets that go to

[Mr. Barnett.]

making decisions which affect the country. We just cannot have a system where the government is run by a particular group of people, where the civil service is not representative of the various groupings that make up our country—and this is only the beginning of a new thrust in government policy to bring the Northwest Territories and the Yukon more into the mainstream of Canadian life.

The President of the Privy Council (Mr. MacEachen), who introduced the bill, made the point that the possibility of additional seats in the House of Commons for the Northwest Territories would be discussed during discussions on the redistribution of parliamentary seats, a matter which is about to be again before the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections. I would think the representatives of those areas now in the House of Commons would attend those meetings and press their case as best they can. I am sympathetic to the idea of an additional seat for the Northwest Territories.

● (2110)

Mr. Nielsen: Would you vote for it?

Mr. Reid: I think I would vote for it, and I think there is a possibility of such a situation coming about. However, I think it is totally absurd that, while we are discussing improving the position of the north in the House of Commons, we do not take advantage of the same opportunity to improve its position in the other legislative institution of government, the Senate of Canada.

Whether the hon. member for Assiniboia (Mr. Knight) likes to admit it or not, the Senate does have equal legislative power with the House of Commons except for the power to introduce money bills. That power belongs only to the House of Commons. But under our constitution the Senate can and has turned back money legislation that was introduced in this House. I refer the hon. member for Assiniboia, who is a young man, to the customs and excise measures turned down by the Senate in the Diefenbaker years.

Mr. Nielsen: And the parks bill.

Mr. Reid: The hon. member for Yukon (Mr. Nielsen) has properly mentioned the parks bill. The problem the NDP have with this piece of legislation is that it affects one of their weak points. That weak point is their commitment to the doctrine that the Senate does not serve any useful purpose. Sometimes the NDP are reasonably flexible, able to keep in touch with what is going on in Canadian society. But this is one of those items where they have no discretion, no ability to distinguish between what is in existence and what they would like things to be. Therefore, they are against this bill, not because it is a bad bill, not because it does not do what it is supposed to do but because it sticks them where it hurts.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. I was going to inquire whether by speaking at this time the minister's parliamentary secretary had closed the debate, but apparently he has opened up the debate. The hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles).

Mr. Stanley Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, I confess that I have wracked my brain to try to