

Senate and House of Commons Act

of the hon. member for Moncton (Mr. Jones) and the bill before us today.

Personally I have not had an opportunity to become that well acquainted with my hon. friend from Moncton. I want to present some different points of view. I appreciate the necessity of the viewpoint that he has put before us here today. I appreciate the point of view that he was making with respect to the rights and privileges of Independent members and a number of the precedents he cited, here and elsewhere. I want to oppose his view and the argument that he made here this afternoon because he made one remark, as I listened, to which I take exception, or that concerns me. I think he said words to the effect that there may well be, in a future parliament or parliaments, a great many more Independent members, and that we should ensure in some manner that the rights of Independent members are broadened. That may well be a good opinion, and he may well be correct in that, but I think that would be a direction that we do not want to see being taken in this parliament and in this country. The majority of us certainly do not sit here as independently elected members. We are elected by and in association with one of the four major parties.

Look at elections in India, the great variety of parties there, and at whether the opposition parties can indeed unite or remain united. Look at the situation in Israel and the fact that there has not been any basic change in government there. There are about 11 or 12 different parties that will be running in the upcoming election in Israel. They are having difficulty coming up with an opposition coalition that will stand up to the government coalition in that country.

We can also look to France, Italy, and a variety of countries. Denmark is another case of which hon. members will be aware. There was an election there not too long ago and some change in representation as a result of that. However, great coalitions of parties are not going to stand up that well. This brings us to the question of the party system and the difficulties for that system in a country like Canada, where we are looking at Quebec with its particular aspirations, and at making Confederation more meaningful.

Certainly in my part of the country we are looking for a more meaningful relationship in terms of confederation. A great deal of talk is heard about western alienation. I think that term is a little too strong. I think disenchantment might be a better and a more descriptive word to apply to the feelings of western Canada with respect to Ottawa and the federal government. The kind of feeling that we have in Quebec and have been dealing with, as a nation, for some time, is certainly not now confined to Quebec.

We, as parliamentarians and as members of the different parties in the country, should be looking to our own party structures, the party structure itself, and seeing if further changes could not and should not be made in the party system to allow for the kind of flexibility that will perhaps give us the same situation as in the United States where the two major parties cover a broad range of ideology within each of them. We have that to a lesser extent here in Canada. Perhaps we

[Mr. McIsaac.]

should have that to a greater extent than we do. I would say to my hon. friend from Moncton that that is an angle and an aspect that perhaps he has not thought about when he seeks to ensure or bring about expanded rights for Independent members.

I have no quarrel with my hon. friend for seeking to be a member of one or two standing committees. He did say, I believe, that standing committees do not really relate to parties. That is not the case, it is not the fact because indeed they do. The representation on various committees is worked out by the party whips and it follows along party lines. While it is true that much of the debate that goes on in a number of committees does not follow party lines, the committees follow the same rules as the House, so in essence I disagree with the hon. member on that statement.

● (1430)

As an independent member he is free to attend committee meetings, to make his contributions, and to participate in the discussions in any of the standing committees. Having said that, I realize that that does not give the hon. member, or any other independent member, the right to vote in the committees, but it certainly does not prevent him from participating in the committees and asking any questions he wishes to put in his field of interest.

I oppose the bill before us because I believe we should be looking for ways of broadening the party system in the country rather than trying to accommodate a wide variety of independent members and turning this Chamber into a kind of city council, which this parliament is not designed to be.

Mr. Eldon M. Woolliams (Calgary North): Mr. Speaker, I listened very carefully to the hon. member for Moncton (Mr. Jones) and I also listened very carefully to the hon. member for Battleford-Kindersley (Mr. McIsaac) who represents that area where I was born. I support some of the arguments that he has advanced.

I want to say to the hon. member for Moncton, with whom I have always had good relations since he came to the House as an independent member, that I am sympathetic to the suggestions he advances in the bill, but if we were to carry the bill through to its ultimate conclusion on a mathematical formula, and we all came here as independent members, then all 262 of us would have the right each to sit on two committees. I ask where that would lead us? I doubt whether the hon. member for Moncton has really considered that. He looks on himself as the sole independent member in the House or as the only member who might be here as an Independent in the future, but I should like to remind him that although our parliamentary system might appear to be a poor system—

Mr. Francis: May I put a question to the hon. member?

Mr. Woolliams: I will answer the hon. member's question when I have concluded my remarks. I left my glasses in my office and I cannot read my scratchy notes. In fact even if I