

THE SENATE AND ITS WORK

MOTION

Hon. Wishart McL. Robertson: Honourable senators, with leave of the Senate, I should like to move:

That the Rules of the Senate be amended by striking out paragraphs 5, 17 and 19 of Rule 78 and substituting the following:

5. The Committee on Transport and Communications, composed of not more than seventeen senators.

17. The Committee on Finance, composed of not more than seventeen senators.

19. The Committee on External Relations, composed of not more than seventeen senators.

And by adding a new Rule 78A, as follows:

78A. The senators occupying the positions of Leader of the Government and Leader of the Opposition in the Senate shall be *ex officio* members of all Standing Committees of the Senate.

As honourable senators know, any motion to amend our rules requires two days' notice. Therefore, unless I have unanimous consent, I cannot proceed now. I have already communicated to a large and representative cross-section of members of the Senate my reasons for proposing these changes in our rules, and I should like to have permission to give an explanation to all who are present at this time.

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, is it your pleasure that the honourable gentleman have permission to speak on this motion, of which notice has not been given?

Some Hon. Senators: Agreed.

The Hon. the Speaker: The honourable gentleman may proceed.

Hon. Mr. Robertson: Honourable senators may recall that last year I moved the following motion:

That a Special Committee of the Senate be appointed to inquire into, and report upon, whatever action in its opinion may be necessary or expedient to enable the Senate to make its maximum contribution to the welfare of the Canadian people.

It will be recalled that after considerable debate I withdrew the motion and at that time indicated that I might have some proposals to make in the matter at this session. I have already been asked about it, and I wish to say now that I intend to proceed with the part of the proposal that I had in mind last session which has not already been dealt with by the Senate.

Let me explain. When I introduced the resolution last session I made some personal suggestions as to some things that I thought might be inquired into by a committee, if honourable members were agreeable. Those things might be roughly divided into two classes: One, things as to which we ourselves could take action in committee; and the other,

things that we might recommend to the government. I think it is safe to say that there was general agreement by honourable members that a special committee was not necessary to consider my motion; that whatever discussion there was could be had in this house. I think it is safe to say also that the discussion we had in the house was chiefly on two or three of the major points that I had suggested might be considered in committee, concerning proposals which would require action by the government, and which we ourselves could not put into effect. For instance, as honourable senators may recall, one of my suggestions was that the special committee might consider recommending that future appointments to the Senate be subject to a retiring age of seventy-five. Another suggestion was that the committee might consider recommending some procedure for Senate appointments that would assure our always having in the Senate at least a minimum representation of political parties other than the major parties.

Varying views were expressed with regard to those matters, but it is my considered opinion that even if we had been unanimous about them we could have done nothing more than make recommendations to the government. The views that were expressed are on record and available to this government or any future government which in its wisdom may see fit to pay heed to them. I therefore cannot see that any useful purpose would be served by further discussion on my proposal of last session to create a special committee for the consideration of these matters. So at this time I wish to direct my attention to suggestions that it is within our power to implement for perfecting our organization and enabling the Senate to render greater service to the public.

Since I have been a member of the Senate, and particularly while I have occupied the post of government leader in this house, I have been struck by one or two outstanding facts. The first of these is that we are greatly handicapped by having major legislation come over to us from the other house late in the session. In an endeavour to reduce that handicap I have tried to have as much legislation as possible introduced in the Senate, and I have been reasonably successful in this. In the main, however, aside from measures that have no financial incidence, the important pieces of legislation are introduced to parliament in the House of Commons, and do not reach us until relatively late in the session. The bill that we ordinarily receive last of all every session, the Supply Bill, is