

Suggested Senate Reform

I personally believe there is a very useful function which the Senate can fill in a federal state. The leader of the C.C.F. has mentioned what is taking place in Norway. But Norway is a unitary state and there is not the problem of protecting provincial rights.

Mr. Coldwell: But the revisal committee could represent and protect the provinces in the same way.

Mr. Low: I suppose that could be done, but at least until we have built up something like a different political concept in its application to the federal system by the safeguarding of provincial rights I think the Senate can continue to perform a very useful function, in addition to being a check on hasty legislation. But that certainly cannot be as long as our present attitude continues toward it, and I am going to ask again why the government does not give the Senate royal commission work to do.

They are perfectly fitted to do that type of work. We in parliament decide to set up commissions and we get judges and others to go about the country carrying on investigations and making reports. "Well," someone might say, "but they are not political." But I would point out that the judges are all appointed by the government in exactly the same way as the senators, and I think senators can be just as detached from political considerations as judges, provided the commissions composed of senators are set up in the proper way and given the proper work to do.

There is a lot of royal commission and investigatory work which could be carried on by the Senate if the government would give it the work to do.

I could not support the subamendment to abolish the Senate. I think it is a wise precaution to have a second chamber in our country and I would like to see it continue. But I would certainly like to see a change in the government's attitude to it; and further I must say I support the idea, as called for in the amendment moved by the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Drew), to institute the necessary consultation and inquiry respecting the reform of the Senate to see what can be done, though I do not think the emphasis requires to be placed so much on reforming the Senate as on reforming the government's attitude toward the Senate.

I believe that if we do it the right way we can raise the second chamber in the estimation of the people by giving it useful work to do, so that it may prove itself a useful body.

Mr. J. M. Macdonnell (Greenwood): Mr. Speaker, I would like to make a few brief comments. I am sure there are many people like myself who feel disturbed to hear the constant slighting and even contemptuous remarks about the Senate. Very often people speak as though the only useful thing to be done with it is to abolish it.

I notice the hon. member for Rosetown-Biggart (Mr. Coldwell) suggested that, and I am entirely in disagreement with him. I did not realize until this morning that the word "reform" was capable of the meaning which the hon. member for Rosetown-Biggart ascribed to it, but I am learning something because, knowing the hon. member to be a scholastic man, I was cautious enough to consult the dictionary and I found that the word "reform" does include among other meanings 'abolish'.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am very sorry to interrupt the hon. member but I am very much interested in that point and I wonder if he has the same dictionary as I, because according to my dictionary the word "reform" does not include "abolish". If you want to reform the church then you need not necessarily abolish the church, and I was going to say, perhaps later on, that abolishing the Senate and reforming the Senate are two different subjects.

Mr. Macdonnell: Well, Mr. Speaker, I will read to you what I found in this dictionary.

Mr. Knowles: Drastic reform.

Mr. Macdonnell: Perhaps, Mr. Speaker, I read it carelessly but I will now read it out loud. The definition is as follows:

To become better by the removal or abandonment of imperfections; to abolish; cure (abuse or malpractice).

I hope I am interpreting it correctly, Mr. Speaker, and that I have not been guilty of misinforming you.

Mr. Speaker: I am inclined to disagree with the hon. member. I do not take the same conclusion as he does from what he has read. I will now quote from the Concise Oxford Dictionary, which is on the table. It states:

Make (person, institution, procedure, conduct, oneself) . . .

Well, the Senate is an institution, so let us make an institution or body of persons become better, for the definition continues:

. . . or (of person or body of persons) become better by removal or abandonment of imperfections, faults, or errors.

Mr. Macdonnell: Please read on, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Later on it states:
. . . abolish, cure, (abuse, malpractice).