

Abolition of Senate

cians. Therefore, it is very important that the upper chamber, with a lot more time at their disposal, deal not only with legislation but also with special enquiries on specific matters. Senators have much more time than we do because we have elective responsibilities, constituency responsibilities requiring that we keep in touch with our constituencies.

Mr. Speaker, reference is often made to the independence of senators and the Senate. I would like to draw a parallel between the independence of members of the legislative power and members of the judiciary. For the simple reason that senators are named for life, they do not have to justify themselves to provide for their retirement, they do not have to favour corporations. A senator is guaranteed employment until age 75, so his contribution is much more important and much more valuable than if he were not independent and did not have such security.

On the other hand, the Senate is the place for a second process of scrutiny of the legislation sent by this House. So as I said, we can rely on a number of experts from various areas, people recognized for their serious nature, experience, ability, independence and wisdom.

Mr. Speaker, the Senate is often accused of being some kind of haven or retirement for former MPs or party members. Was not Mr. MacDonald, the former president of the Canadian Labour Council, a former member of Parliament? How many former members of Parliament are now part of what I call the labour union senate? I could name some, Mr. Speaker, who went back to private life and joined the senate of labour unions, that is they have found employment there and it is very good for labour unions to benefit from those talents. I know some, as I was saying, who are making a very important contribution to labour union activities. And I am sure those unions can be glad to have among them former members of Parliament, people who have been with unions before and whose experience in the House of Commons in drafting legislation now contributes greatly to union activities.

Mr. Pinard: Age has nothing to do with competence.

Mr. Dupras: Age, no. My colleague from Drummond (Mr. Pinard) just said that age has nothing to do with competence. The only restriction, Mr. Speaker, is that people called to the Senate must be at least 35 years old.

Mr. Speaker, I think that my hon. colleagues are fairly familiar with the business of the Senate. However, in order to emphasize the Senate activities and its importance for Canadian government institutions, I should also mention the Committee on External Affairs composed of 20 members with a quorum of five. This committee is mainly responsible for the study of bills, messages, petitions, the interpretation of documents and other matters related to external relations and to relations with the Commonwealth in general, including, Mr. Speaker, the study of international treaties and agreements, foreign trade, foreign assistance, defence, immigration, territorial affairs and matters arising off our coasts.

There is also the very important Committee on Finance composed of 20 members which has a motion to this effect;

[Mr. Dupras.]

once again, it is responsible for the study of bills, messages, petitions, and particularly for the study of national accounts and the report of the Auditor General, and God knows, Mr. Speaker, how essential it is to have the report of the Auditor General examined by as many experts as possible.

There is finally the Committee on Transport and Communications whose specific responsibilities are tourism, public vehicles, pipelines, transmission lines and energy transport, navigation, shipping and navigable waters. There is also the Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs, one on Banking, Trade and Commerce, one on Health, Welfare and Science, the Committee on Agriculture and so on.

Mr. Speaker, we have often heard that the senatorial office was of a special nature. In fact, it is of a judiciary nature. By reviewing our legislation, the senator must try to establish an equitable balance in the relations between men, between social classes and between various communities, without paying attention to the distribution of the votes. This is obvious because he is not accountable to Parliament.

I will say in conclusion, Mr. Speaker, that to make the Senate an elective body would amount to destroying its present judiciary character. Just like the American Senate, it would become a second House of Commons, and in that respect it would encroach upon the rights of the House of Commons. The division of the elected representatives of the people between two houses would bring about few advantages and a lot of inconveniences.

Mr. Speaker, the members of the New Democratic Party are not the only ones who have questioned the very existence of the Senate. I now would like to conclude my remarks by giving a brief summary of the conclusions reached by Professor Konz of McGill University in his study on this part of the Canadian government system and I quote:

The most obvious are linked to the continuous expansion of the studies of the Senate committee in the field of legislation, control and inquiry but most particularly in the last two fields. Greatly helped by the flexibility of its calendar and its impartial spirit, the Senate could develop important and efficient means with which to control certain aspects of the financial administration, especially as it relates to Crown corporations . . .

These remarks are quite pertinent, Mr. Speaker.

. . . and investigate certain practices of the executive, particularly with regard to legislative delegation. The Senate could also increase the number of special inquiries that it carries through each year and enlarge both their purpose and scope. All of it requires little external impulsion and could be achieved through creative leadership and a few changes in the internal structure. In fact, the best practical means to "reform" the Senate seems to reside in taking advantage of the inherent possibilities within the structure of that very institution.

Mr. Speaker, before closing my remarks, I would like to say a few words and I know that my hon. colleague from Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) will bear a grudge against me if I did not say a few words on his Bill C-203, and particularly with regard to clause 9 at page 2, for I am a little disappointed by this part of the bill which states and I quote: