

and legislation. But this Senate of 102 members depends on how many for information? On just one. It is true that when a bill is sent to committee the minister of the department concerned will, at our request, appear with his deputy and other departmental officials to answer any questions that we may wish to put. But besides being able to obtain information through standing committees, members of the House of Commons and of every legislature can question ministers in Committee of the Whole.

My point is that in the Senate, to which all legislative measures have to be submitted, it is not possible for a senator to receive in Committee of the Whole the information which he is entitled to receive. To be able to give a full explanation of every measure that comes before us would require far more ability and knowledge than I think any one person possesses, unless he be a superman, and I certainly make no claim to being that. The fact is that my honourable friends opposite have been very tolerant. When they have asked for more information than I happened to have at hand, they have been willing to wait for it, a week or two if necessary, and have not complained. But how much easier it would be to discuss legislation intelligently here if there were always present someone with a thorough grasp of the whole matter being dealt with, and if when a measure was being considered clause by clause he was able to call upon one or two departmental officials for the fullest particulars upon any details.

Hon. Mr. Aseltine: May I interrupt the honourable leader? Do we not get full information in our standing committees now? Every member of the Senate has a right to attend the sittings of any committee, whether he is a member of it or not. I personally can say that I have never left a committee to which a bill was referred without feeling that I had all the information that I required.

Hon. Mr. Robertson: Time and time again I have emphasized in this house that every senator is entitled to attend meetings of any committee, whether he is a member of the committee or not. But I think we will all agree that in practice there are always some senators who feel diffident about coming to meetings of committees to which they do not belong. That is particularly true of junior senators. But whatever the reason for non-attendance of some senators, I can point to bill after bill which has been considered in committee by only a relatively small percentage of our total membership.

Now I come to another suggestion. I seriously think that if the Senate is to be

what it is supposed to be, it should elect its own leader, subject to its will. That is a power commonly possessed by groups of persons banded together for any specific purpose. I would elect the Senate leader at regular intervals, say every five years, and have him subject to recall, and generally deriving his power from the house, as is usual in parliamentary institutions.

Hon. Mr. MacLennan: Suppose the Senate elected a Liberal as its leader, and the colour of the other house changed very much from what it is today. Would that Liberal senator be given a seat in a Conservative government?

Hon. Mr. Robertson: I suggest that the leader of this house should not be a member of the government. I am government leader here by appointment, and I am leader of the Senate by default, because no one else has been appointed to the position. The members of this house did not choose me, and whether they want me or not as leader they can do nothing about it. We have said time and again that this is an independent house, and I contend that an independent house ought to be able to elect its own leader, whose responsibility it would be to co-operate with the administration of the day—no matter to what political party the members of that administration belonged—in expediting the business of parliament according to the will of the majority in the Senate.

Hon. Mr. Haig: I should like to ask a question of the honourable leader. Suppose the Senate had been empowered to elect its own leader, and suppose—it will take a lot of imagination to consider this as at all possible, but I am putting it just for the sake of the argument—suppose that when the new parliament met at the middle of September, 1949, a majority of senators had said, "John T. Haig, we elect you our leader."

Some Hon. Senators: Hear, hear.

Hon. Mr. Haig: What would have happened? Though then a member of the government, it is quite possible that I should have had to recommend to this house that certain government legislation be not passed. I think that kind of thing would result in chaos.

Hon. Mr. Robertson: I will take my honourable friend up on that argument. To begin with, I am suggesting that the leader of the Senate should not be a member of the government. And, secondly, I say that the representation of the government in this house is a most important matter, so important that it ought to be much better done than it is at present, so far as concerns the giving of information to this house on government policy and measures. I think that any possible government, to whatever political party its