

Senate Reform

campaign as "neutral" representatives? In fact, perhaps the Members of a reformed Senate could help to strengthen our national political Parties in areas where representation is now lacking. In this case, why should they want to hide their Party's allegiance? I know the Hon. Member would like to see regional representation emphasized above other considerations in a reformed Senate, but I am not sure we should go as far as he proposes, even if Section 10 of Bill C-640 were practical.

There are other questions about this Bill that come to mind but I know other Hon. Members wish to participate in what I consider a very timely debate. Once again, I commend the Hon. Member for Edmonton East for his hard work and thoughtful presentations on Senate reform. He has helped to show how the Parliament of Canada can help lead a public debate on Senate reform. I hope other Members will follow his example in the coming months as our Special Joint Committee carries out its work. I would think, as a personal observation, that members of the Special Joint Committee would be remiss if they did not include the Hon. Member for Edmonton East as one of their witnesses. I hope that they will give very careful attention to the Hon. Member's Bill C-640. It is a good piece of work which serves the Parliament and people of Canada well, and I would like to commend the Hon. Member.

Mr. Jim Manly (Cowichan-Malahat-The Islands): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the Hon. Member for Edmonton East (Mr. Yurko) for bringing Bill C-640 before the House. I think the question of Senate reform is one which has been appropriate in Canada for many years. As has been said before, everyone knows we need Senate reform because, quite frankly, the Senate has not served the cause of Canadian democracy. In fact, it has very often served to undermine it. We should not be surprised because, in fact, the Senate was not designed to enhance democracy; rather, it was designed to keep a check on it. It is to prevent a surfeit of democracy. Sir John A. Macdonald, in one of his more cynical comments, said, "We must protect the interests of minorities, and the rich are always fewer in number than the poor". So much for the protection of minorities, those whom the Senate is supposed to look after.

● (1500)

The Senate does not have a terribly distinguished history. In 1896, allegations were made that Senate seats were on sale at a bargain basement rate of \$10,000. The money was supposed to go into the coffers of the Party which was in power at that time, which just happened to be the Liberal Party.

Mr. Nickerson: Things haven't changed very much.

Mr. Manly: I do not believe that Senate seats are being sold these days. I believe that they are being given away.

In our time we have seen a steady stream of appointments by the present Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau), who has appointed friends and cronies. Therefore, I welcome the Hon. Member's initiative in bringing forth the Bill.

Bill C-640 attempts to deal with some of the problems in Senate appointment. One of the basic problems, as those of us from western Canada know, is the present regional imbalance. I am not sure whether it is laughable or lamentable, but considering the low opinion which most of us have of the Senate, I suppose it is laughable that a Province like British Columbia, with 2.8 million people, has six Senators, and Prince Edward Island has four Senators. Perhaps six Senators is enough for British Columbia. However, the Hon. Member wants to get around this imbalance by creating an extra region in the Pacific which would take in British Columbia and the Yukon. That seems to be a reasonable compromise if we are to have a Senate. However, we must ask if we really need more Senators. Is this really the route by which to go?

I am concerned that Bill C-640 has a very cumbersome process of appointment. The Hon. Member for Edmonton East outlined a two-tiered system of appointments by which some would be appointed on a regional basis through the federal Government and others would be appointed provincially by provincial Governments. The process seems to me to be cumbersome and rather difficult to understand. It would mean that ordinary people would not really know how their Senators were appointed. Of course, that would be no different from now when many people wonder how the Senators are appointed.

The Hon. Member pointed to the problem that a fully-elected Senate would overshadow the House of Commons. To me this seems to rather beg the question. If a Senate which was to be elected and had real power would overshadow the House of Commons, and that is really what we are afraid of, then what is this whole exercise about? If we need to strengthen the House of Commons so that we have the power to do the things that we need to do to serve the people of Canada, let us do that, but let us not just tinker with the system and have a Senate which is neither fish nor fowl, nor even a good red herring.

The appointments of Senators by the Provinces, which the Hon. Member would retain, would continue to retain the patronage elements which I think all of us, or at least all of us within this Party, would want to see eliminated.

The possibility of the reconfirmation of present Senators when they reach the age of 75 rather boggles the mind. Some of these Senators whom we have seen appointed over the last few months will not reach the mandatory age of retirement until well into the twenty-first century. To think that 25 years from now, these tired old Senators would come up and people would actually have to vote as to whether or not they wanted them to retire finally or not, seems to me to be a little bit ludicrous.

However, apart from the specific merits or demerits of Bill C-640, it seems to me that there are two fundamental questions which we must ask about Senate reform. The first is, will any genuine reform of the Senate be acceptable to the Government? The quick answer to that is no. The Government does not want Senate reform because there is no point in it from the