

Newfoundland

Mr. Knowles: May I say a further word on this matter, arising out of the section with which we are now dealing. I should like to say first of all that I do not see why our Tory friends to the right are so concerned about the lack of nominal Tories in the Senate. Most of the Liberals who go over there soon become Tories, anyway.

Mr. Mitchell: You have a few Tories yourself.

Mr. Knowles: They are not looking for places in the Senate, though.

Mr. Mitchell: Oh, I don't know about that.

Mr. Fraser: I would hate to see one offered to you.

Mr. Rowe: There will be many over there looking for them now.

Mr. Knowles: The very fact that we are dealing with this subject in the jocular manner which has characterized our discussions in the last half hour or so—

An hon. Member: Speak for yourself.

Mr. Knowles: —suggests the sense of frustration which we feel about this branch of parliamentary government, namely the other place. I think the hon. member for Macleod was hitting the nail on the head when he referred to some disillusionment on the part of people with respect to parliamentary institutions; and that part of that stems from the feeling that we are maintaining an institution which does not fill a proper and necessary place.

My question, either of the Prime Minister, or of the Minister of National Defence, both of whom were involved in these negotiations, is this: Was there any discussion with the representatives from Newfoundland about possible changes in or reforms of the Senate?

Mr. St. Laurent: To the best of my knowledge the question was not raised.

Mr. Knowles: By neither side?

Mr. St. Laurent: By neither side.

Mr. Knowles: Then I take it that the present government is not concerned with reforming the Senate?

Mr. St. Laurent: Oh, my hon. friend can take what he likes from it, but that does not flow from anything I said. I said, on the contrary, that there were in our party many members who were concerned about a situation which was apt to arise under conditions forecast by the hon. member for Davenport.

Mr. Graydon: Not forecast, no; it was a hypothetical question.

Mr. Fleming: At the risk of changing the subject, I should like to draw the attention

[Mr. St. Laurent.]

of the committee to another provision in the group of articles with which the committee is now dealing. Article 6 (3) states:

The chief electoral officer shall have authority to adapt the provisions of The Dominion Elections Act, 1938, to conditions existing in the province of Newfoundland so as to conduct effectually the first election of members to serve in the House of Commons.

Attention has already been directed to the fact that this election cannot take place in any event until after April 1. In view of that circumstance, what justification can there be for vesting, in an appointed official, authority to adapt legislative enactments of this parliament? That seems to me an extraordinary provision. Parliament enacts provisions, and now it is proposed that an appointed official shall be given authority to adapt those legislative provisions to meet the circumstances of Newfoundland.

I suggest there is ample time for parliament to do everything required to adapt the provisions of the elections act to the circumstances to be found in Newfoundland, and that this is a departure which parliament ought not lightly to tolerate, namely the proposal that authority be vested in an appointed official to adapt the legislative enactments of this parliament.

Mr. St. Laurent: The hon. member for Eglinton might do well to read the elections act. He would find in it provisions put there by parliament authorizing the electoral officers to adapt the provisions of the act to special circumstances of individual cases. That was put there by parliament, and has been there for a great many years. Probably it was there when the hon. member was reading the elections act in his university days.

There exist in Newfoundland special circumstances which do not exist in other Canadian provinces. There are provisions for the revision of electoral lists by officials who are called by one name—county or district court judges—in the other Canadian provinces, and these judicial functions are normally performed by an official who goes under another designation in Newfoundland. It is matters of that kind which the chief electoral officer would have to adapt as conditions arose, as he is authorized to make those adaptations under the elections act for the other parts of Canada. That is all there is to it; there is nothing more sinister than that.

Mr. Fleming: If this article contemplates vesting in the elections officer nothing more than the powers he now has under the Dominion Elections Act, is that matter not sufficiently taken care of by the bill introduced yesterday by the Minister of Justice, which would have the effect of applying the