

**Senator Doody:** No. Senator Bélisle did not open the debate. This is a debate on the report tabled by the chairman of the committee. I am certainly glad Senator Flynn is not here.

**Senator Gigantès:** I always regret his absence.

**The Hon. the Speaker pro tempore:** Would you please put the motion for the adoption of the report?

**Senator Neiman:** I move adoption of the report.

**The Hon. the Speaker pro tempore:** It is moved by the Honourable Senator Neiman, seconded by the Honourable Senator Côtteau, that this report be adopted now. Is it your pleasure, honourable senators, to adopt the motion?

[Translation]

**Senator Bélisle:** Honourable senators, Bill S-7 has been before the Senate since April 2, 1987, nearly fourteen months. I opened the debate on second reading on April, 1987, when a long series of adjournments began. We first adjourned until May 26, 1987, exactly one year ago, when Senator Hébert made a speech in which he made it abundantly clear that he did not like Opus Dei. After a second adjournment, debate was resumed on June 2, 1987. On that day, it was Senator Le Moynes's turn to explain that he didn't like Opus Dei. Neither of the two speakers considered the substance of the bill. Subsequently, Senator Corbin adjourned the debate until June 17, 1987, when after a speech in which he told us he didn't like Opus Dei either, he moved for further adjournment.

On June 29, 1987, after a few brief explanations, I was allowed to make a speech in which I responded to several objections and clarified many of the questions raised in the previous speeches. Then Senator Corbin adjourned the debate once again, this time until September 16, 1987, when he finally finished the speech he had started three months earlier. A further adjournment was requested, this time by Senator Stollery, who three weeks later declined to speak to the bill.

Finally, the bill was read a second time on October 27, 1987, and referred to the Standing Senate Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs.

This year, the committee sat four times to examine the bill: February 23, when the petitioner and his advisers were present, on March 8 and on May 5 and 12. Earlier, the chairman of the committee explained that the committee had been held up by other bills, and I understood.

At the last sitting, as we were just informed, the committee approved Bill S-7 with several amendments.

One cannot claim the bill has not been very carefully examined. The two senators who voiced their objections publicly in committee, Senators Hébert and Gigantès, have had all the time they wanted to examine every aspect of the bill. They informed us of all their objections which, I may add, were more theological than legal in nature and were based on their dislike of an institution of the Catholic Church, in this case Opus Dei, but were unable to convince either their colleagues in the Senate or those in committee, which is not surprising.

[English]

Honourable senators, since Confederation some 102 private bills have been tabled in the Senate on behalf of various religious bodies of different denominations, and, as the chairman has said, 23 religious organizations have been approved. All of those bills were adopted. Moreover, they were adopted relatively quickly and without anyone ever remotely considering the possibility of scrutinizing the beliefs or convictions of the petitioners.

It is only a few years since Canada enshrined in its Constitution a Charter officially recognizing freedom of religion. Yet we now witness members of this house taking advantage of their parliamentary prerogatives to criticize publicly the religious traditions of an official institution of the Roman Catholic Church, thus violating the principle of the separation of church and state, of religious beliefs and political opinions.

My colleagues, who are opposing the enactment of Bill S-7, are doing so for reasons that have nothing to do with the substance of the bill or with the law of this country.

During the last three meetings of the committee our Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel and the Chief of the Legal Division in Consumer and Corporate Affairs Canada repeatedly stated that the bill is perfectly consistent with Canadian law and that the request of the petitioner is fully justified. So as to appease the apprehensions of a few senators, they proposed—and the committee endorsed, with explicit consent of the petitioner—amendments aimed at providing for greater transparency in the financial operations of the corporation that the bill creates. These amendments constitute a legislative precedent, since none of the private bills previously adopted in this area contain similar provisions. This legislative precedent thus imposes on the corporation that we are being asked to create requirements that go beyond those generally imposed by law on corporate bodies.

[Translation]

Honorable senators, it seems to me it is high time, after nearly fourteen months of study, that we decided to adopt Bill S-7, which contains a petition that, according to our committee, is entirely justified and justifiable.

[English]

**Senator Gigantès:** Honourable senators, I should like to adjourn this debate in my name. I promise Senator Bélisle that I shall speak on this on Tuesday next.

On motion of Senator Gigantès, debate adjourned.

## GOVERNMENT ORGANIZATION BILL, ATLANTIC CANADA, 1987

SECOND READING—DEBATE CONTINUED

On the Order:

Resuming the debate on the motion of the Honourable Senator Murray, P.C., seconded by the Honourable Senator Flynn, P.C., for the second reading of the Bill C-103, An Act to increase opportunity for economic development in Atlantic Canada, to establish the Atlantic Canada