

Nevertheless, if there were some major questions of principle, the Senate would certainly have a contribution to make.

I agree that Senator Flynn is a perfect gentleman most of the time, and I say this in all sincerity, except when he indulges in untimely remarks which he usually ends up regretting and promptly tries to forget, as we do.

Senator Flynn: I forget yours too.

Senator Corbin: That's fine with me. But the words I quoted just now were not spoken in the heat of debate. They were spoken calmly before an attentive audience.

He interpreted what happened in the other place, that is, that closure was imposed at the third reading stage as a way to counter a simple strategy by the opposition.

Honourable senators, it was the first time a government used closure to put an end to what historically has always been a dispassionate and non-partisan debate, tending to lead to a broad national consensus, to the general satisfaction of all parties, and, if I may say so, of the electorate.

[English]

That, honourable senators, was one of the flaws affecting the process in Bill C-74; the use of closure, the guillotine, with the consequent result that we were sent an imperfect bill with imperfect solutions to a problem.

[Translation]

Nor do I agree with Senator Flynn's other comment, and I quote:

I would say this is an area that almost exclusively concerns the House of Commons—

On the contrary, we as senators are involved on four counts: first of all, as individuals we are voters like any other Canadian who is entitled to vote. We have the right to examine what is done in the House of Commons with respect to the government's legislative proposals. It is as simple as that. We are like any other member of the public.

Second, it has been understood ever since the beginning of Confederation that the Senate speaks for the interests of the regions and the provinces. Bill C-74, in terms of its nature and its impact on representation of the regions and the individual provinces in the House of Commons, is exactly the kind of bill that should be given thorough consideration by the Senate. To remain silent on a matter as fundamental as the readjustment of electoral boundaries, as Senator Flynn almost persuaded us to do, would be irresponsible in the extreme.

Senator Flynn: Honourable senators, I want to raise a question of privilege. I did not discuss the kind of issues you have been mentioning since the beginning of your speech.

Senator Corbin: Honourable senators, if I have offended the sensibilities of Senator Flynn, I apologize.

Third, senators are very specifically involved in the adjustment process, as stated in Clause 7 of the bill. The bill says:

For greater certainty, any member of Parliament may make representations at any sittings held by a commission for the hearing of representations from interested persons.

[Senator Corbin.]

"Any member of Parliament" includes senators, as we were told and as was confirmed in committee.

Furthermore, honourable senators, when we read the following on page 1 of Bill C-74:

Her Majesty—

Do we or do we not respect Her Majesty?

Her Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Senate and House of Commons of Canada, enacts as follows:

What are we doing here, Senator Flynn? Do we or do we not have a right to examine?

Senator Flynn: Try to understand.

Senator Corbin: Do we have authority to comment on bills, yes or no? I say yes, and the proof is there.

Finally, we are the chamber of sober second thought and of correction when the bills we get are badly drafted. Such was the case of Bill C-74. It is full of inaccurate terms, ill-defined objectives and nebulous formulae, and our duty is to point out these errors and shortcomings and to amend the bill accordingly. Apparently the government and its supporters wanted us to expedite our review. I acknowledge their right to put pressure on us, but it does not mean they were right. In my opinion that was not correct. Nor did they want to accept the amendments required to correct blatant discrepancies between the English and French versions.

For all practical purposes we were asked to pass imperfect legislation, sight unseen as it were. Why? Because any amendment means the bill has to be sent back to the House of Commons, something which this government does not want right now. It is unfortunate for the government, for Canadians and for the elected representatives, for in the end they will be most directly affected by the inaccuracies and confusing wording of the legislation.

Over the weekend I read the study done by Professor John C. Courtney for the Royal Commission on the Economic Union and Development Prospects for Canada. This study appears in Volume 38 titled "The Size of Canada's Parliament: An Assessment of the Implications of a Larger House of Commons".

On several occasions when he appeared before the House of Commons committee, Professor Courtney referred to "regional concerns," the "search for ways to meet the requirements of regionalism in national institutions and better regional representation," and so forth. Those are the kinds of concerns expressed by Senator Stewart and myself throughout the study of this bill, so we are not alone in that respect.

Professor Courtney also refers to minorities in his study, and I quote:

A larger number of members in the House of Commons might have other consequences for the parliamentary, electoral and redistribution systems. If there were more MPs and smaller ridings, the minorities which for too long have been under-represented in Parliament might find it easier to appoint candidates for the main parties