

today—they seem to be saying the following: If we in this chamber do not automatically, by definition, adopt every piece of legislation that the government tells us to, on the date and according to the timetable that the government specifies, then we are in danger of being abolished. I would like to echo the words which were used by Senator Hicks and others here today, which were: If we are in a position where that is all we can do, then we ought to have a very serious debate about whether we ought to be here at all, because that is a ridiculous position to be in.

Some Hon. Senators: Hear, hear.

Senator Kirby: It seems to me, therefore, that the arguments made by Senators Roblin, Murray and others apply not only to this bill. That is what is bothering me. Their arguments vis-à-vis the future of the Senate and vis-à-vis the role of the Senate—remembering that we have had the bill for only four weeks—apply to any piece of legislation. If, in fact, they really believe those arguments, then they are taking a fundamental position with regard to the future of this chamber.

In light of that, let me point out one other thing to them. Senator Roblin, in the course of his comments today, quoted clearly a statement from the press that questioned the continued existence of the Senate as we know it.

It seems to me that the Senate itself, in a report tabled in this chamber less than a year ago, seriously questioned the existence of the Senate in its present form. I do not know why we should be suddenly upset because the media start asking that question. It seems to me it is a question we have all posed.

In any proposal for Senate reform that has been seriously discussed in this chamber, in Parliament or, indeed, in federal-provincial conferences in the last 10 years, one key element has always been that the Senate maintain a suspensive veto. I say to you today, honourable senators, that is all that has transpired in the course of discussion of this piece of legislation. There has been no attempt to amend the bill and there has been no attempt to defeat the bill.

Senator Flynn: Obstruction.

Senator Kirby: All that has happened is that we have suspended the passage of the bill and have kept the bill in committee for four weeks.

If the vote of a suspensive veto is no longer to be considered a vote for the Senate, then I suggest to you once again that we are essentially making the argument for our own demise.

Having looked at all the options, I finally came to the conclusion that the real reason for the inflexibility on the part of the government is contained in the statement read into the record by Senator Guay earlier today. In his reply, Senator Murray confirmed the statement, which is contained in the *Gazette* of today. It states:

“If they get away with this one,” said Senator Lowell Murray . . . “they’d be encouraged to repeat the performance on any bill that strikes their fancy.”

In spite of the offers Senator MacEachen made as recently as Monday to the Minister of Finance, when he said that, if

uncertainty was the issue, we would guarantee passage of this bill within 72 hours of the estimates being tabled—and if he had wanted more than certainty, he could have had Part I last Monday or four weeks ago—we have seen absolutely no attempt at reaching a compromise solution on the part of the government. What we are really seeing is a very interesting phenomenon in which it appears that Senator Murray and some of his colleagues have taken the view that any element of compromise or any element to reach an accommodation with the other side in this chamber is going to be viewed as a sign of weakness, which will be regarded by the opposition side of this chamber as a sign of its strength; and, thereafter, to quote Senator Murray again, the run will be on and the opposition would be encouraged to repeat the performance “on any bill that strikes their fancy.”

Having had some modest experience, not in this chamber but in dealing with provincial legislatures and both sides of the federal Parliament, it seems to me that, if the government members of this chamber are going to take the view, which has been eloquently, clearly and truthfully put by Senator Murray, that any element of compromise in the future, any element of discussion in reaching an accommodation with the other side, will be treated as a sign of weakness, then we are in for a very fascinating, but very rough, four years.

I would suggest to Senator Murray that, while it is not in the interest of the bravado stand he wants to take—simply taking the position that he has to win every fight on every single issue, every step of the way, and that he is not prepared to be flexible on anything—to the extent that he and his colleagues continue to take that position, he will make the effective management of this chamber, the effective management of government business and the effective role that I genuinely believe this chamber can play for the Canadian people increasingly difficult, if not impossible.

Therefore, I would hope that once this measure is over, Senator Murray will reconsider his position.

Some Hon. Senators: Hear, hear.

Senator Kirby: Finally, in closing, honourable senators, let me repeat what I said a number of times before the committee, and that is simply this: The issue before us is a matter of principle. It is an issue which the government itself could have solved four weeks ago. It is an issue which the Liberal members of the committee have indicated very clearly will be solved within 72 hours of the tabling of the main estimates.

We have been told today by Senator Roblin that that will be next Tuesday. We know now that, regardless of what happens between now and then, this issue will be dealt with and finished by the end of next week.

For the sake of the few days that are at stake in this issue, I, for one, think it would be extremely wrong of us to proceed to violate the principle that the Conservative Party has so strongly argued for over the years. I believe that it would be wrong, simply for the sake of expediting matters by three or four days,