

elected. So all that this debate tells me, and all that the consideration that is being given to this bill tells me, is that this body should be elected!

Some Hon. Senators: Hear, hear.

Senator MacDonald: Honourable senators, by way of correction, I believe that Senator Everett attributed to me the word "ludicrous", when I referred to the matter of having representation in the Atlantic that was out of proportion. If I said "ludicrous", then I did not mean to, and I hope the record will not show that. If Senator Stewart can pull this off, then I am all in favour of it. I was making reference to the fact that I think the attempt would strain our credulity. I did not say it was a ludicrous idea.

Hon. Brenda M. Robertson: Honourable senators, I had not planned to speak to this particular issue. However, Senator MacEachen brought up an issue that concerns me when he referred to the great workload of MPs. Certainly I do not disagree that, under the present system, our members of Parliament are greatly strained and that their time does not stretch sufficiently to meet the demands that are placed upon them. But what has concerned me for many years is how the federal government has grown and how the federal government has got into duplication and multiplication of programs that normally were once considered to be delivered by the provinces or the municipalities. It seems to me that if the federal government were to pull back and do only those things that the federal government should do, and allocate to provinces and municipalities those responsibilities which quite properly rest with them, the workload of MPs would certainly be much lighter than it is now. I could cite honourable senators example after example.

Surely the role of the federal government, in many areas, particularly in those areas where we are contributing dollars—and in many instances large amounts of dollars—is not to deliver the program, messing up someone else's backyard, where that someone else has the capability of delivering the program? Its role is to be there in a monitoring capacity, setting standards and ensuring that those standards are met.

I would be one of the first to urge my own government to step back and let someone else do it, because I believe that the federal government is not the best agency for delivering many of the programs that are being delivered to the provinces today. There is a lot of waste, there is a lot of duplication as we all know. Personally, I would like to see the federal government, where it is involved with dollars being spent, concentrate more on setting standards and ensuring that those standards are met having regard to the money that is provided for whatever the service is.

● (1530)

[Translation]

Hon. Jacques Flynn: Honorables senators, I listened with interest to the debate on third reading of this bill which has been before the Senate since December 18.

I must say I find it very difficult to understand and to reconcile the various positions taken by Senators Stewart, Corbin, MacEachen and Fairbairn.

Their comments led Senator Everett to make his remarks on the subject of Senate representation, which is relevant to some extent. I will get back to this later on. Senator Robertson spoke about the territorial aspect of electoral districts. I intend to comment on this as well. I found nothing in what was said by the senators who were opposed to the bill which actually came to grips with the problem.

I think there has been an attempt to create a false impression. They have been trying to make a mountain out of a molehill. And of course, the champion of them all was Senator Corbin!

Senator Corbin: Thank you!

Senator Flynn: He exaggerated in every way he could. He distorted my comments. He invented a host of imaginary monsters which he then proceeded to attack most viciously.

And what is left of the objections that were formulated? I had the misfortune to say there had been no fundamental objections in the other place. I repeat, there were no fundamental objections, but there was a strategic objection. We know that the Liberal Party is finding it very difficult to live with its opposition status. It keeps looking for an excuse to provoke debate and create controversy. It is happiest when it gets the government to impose closure. This means they are no longer talking about the bill but about the fact they are being prevented from speaking to the bill. They shout that they can't speak, that they can't express their objections to the bill because they don't have time to do so! The Liberals spend hours repeating they don't have time to say what they want to say.

Senator Corbin gave us the prime example of this when he said: "We don't have time, you are pushing us."

Imagine, this small group of Conservative senators trying to rush the majority! The bill has been before the Senate since December 18 last year. It has been referred twice to the Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs. The debate on third reading has been going on for several days. Often, when the Order of the Day was called to resume debate on the bill, no one took the floor.

Apparently, the Liberal Party's tactic is one of silence, what we could call a silent filibuster. There was nothing to prevent debate, Senator Corbin. You had your chance to say everything you wanted to say at least twice.

In fact, after all your complaints about the Liberal Party being rushed, you said at page 2055:

I spoke and argued a great deal when the bill was being considered.

You certainly did speak a great deal and you argued a great deal, but you didn't say much of any substance, to be quite honest.

Senator Corbin: That's your opinion. You weren't even here.

Senator Flynn: I read your comments.