

Government Orders

I see that my time is about to expire. I am sorry that is the case. I could go on at length on this bill. I have a lot of things I would like to say about these amendments. However, I will bow to the Chair's position and I will sit down.

Mr. Pat Nowlan (Annapolis Valley—Hants): Madam Speaker, I want to participate although I know time is limited under the rules. I believe it is ten minutes at this stage.

I want to compliment the hon. member for Kingston and the Islands on most of what he said. I was very interested in what he said and I am glad he finally said it. Madam Speaker, you have been in the chair for a good part of the day, the majority of the day. I have been sitting here in the House for the days it has gone on. I got from the table and from the committee clerk the time involved in Bill C-81 in terms of second reading 16.5 hours, about two and a half days. Second reading was two and a half days. Here we are with allocation of time so that at 7.30 p.m. tonight the bells will start to ring for 15 minutes and then we vote on a multitude of amendments. The 64 have been consolidated in either 40 or 23, depending on who you speak to.

The thing is passing strange. We are debating the referendum bill on the Constitution of Canada. We had a statement from the Minister Responsible for Constitutional Affairs this afternoon, thank goodness, and the loyal opposition spokesperson and the NDP spokesperson. They, at least, were elevating the debate in terms of their participation.

As an independent member who used to belong in the government party, I had the fundamental problem on the Constitution with the government party. We are debating the referendum bill that is giving the government, correctly, a vehicle or a tool to put many serious questions to the Canadian people and take it out of the hands of the leaders of the land who have not been able to define the consensus and I do not think they are going to be able to define the consensus.

I watched Premier Bourassa last night on television pretending that the Senate problem was going to keep him away from the bargaining table. I have partial sympathy for that chameleon of political science, the premier of Quebec. I can sympathize that he may not want to get involved in the federal-provincial negoti-

ations now with some of the apparent agreements in principle with no legal text. Therefore, blame it on the Senate. Who wants the Senate—an appointed body that is an anachronism of history and has no place in a democratic elected system?

This may be the hang-up people are pretending it is. Frankly, for Premier Bourassa it is one of the double ironies in the world. He stayed away from the bargaining. I can understand his post-Meech hangover, or post-Meech depression. There was a depression across the country because things had been whipped up in the country, whipped up with a lot of intellectual dishonesty that never should have happened. It was one of the problems I had to face and I finally walked.

Having had the problems, having had the initial backing off and understanding in part—I am very open on this, but I am also a very practical politician—I can see politicians in several parties and/or perhaps the premier of Quebec using the dead Senate issue. I say the Senate is dead until it gets some credibility and if you are going to have it, it has to be elected, I agree with that.

Then we get into all the processes, all the definitions of what we give it, power, and how do you have it elected, and is it equal, is it equitable, and/or regional.

Let us go back to the beginning. Let us eliminate the Senate and give the people a chance to vote as to whether they even want a Senate. The NDP used to be a party proud of at least standing for some principle in reform and it was abolition of the Senate. I do not agree with the objectives of my colleagues the Parti Québécois but I do give them credit. I am totally against what they want but at least they speak with some conviction on what they want.

We have been in this debate and I agree it has been shortened. I understand the government's problem, but frankly, all members, without obstruction, should have a chance to speak on this issue which is fundamental to the core of the nation. Here we are with an allocation order that is going to terminate tonight and then a third reading tomorrow and we have not had a leader of the three national parties speak in this debate.

With the greatest respect for the House of Commons, having been here longer than most members in the House, this is a terrible insult to the whole history and tradition.