

That the Meech Lake Constitutional Accord and texts subsequently agreed to be referred to a Committee of the Whole for the purpose of hearing witnesses and making a report.—(Honourable Senator Murray, P.C.).

Hon. Lowell Murray (Leader of the Government and Minister of State for Federal-Provincial Relations): Honourable senators, I yield to Senator Phillips.

Hon. Orville H. Phillips: Honourable senators, following my questioning of Senator MacEachen when he introduced the motion, I indicated that I would probably not be speaking on this subject. However, my son recently gave me a package of memos entitled: "Everybody is Entitled to My Opinion." Perhaps it is in that mood that I am speaking today.

Senator Frith: I suppose that we cannot waive that right!

Senator Phillips: Yes, you can; you can withdraw the motion!

Senator Frith: That is not what I said.

Senator Phillips: The subject has not been discussed in our caucus—I rather anticipate that it will be tomorrow—so today the views are mine and no one else's.

There is no objection on this side to examining the Meech Lake accord. In fact, we are happy with it, and are rather pleased that this government was able to cooperate with the provinces and bring them all into Confederation. The Prime Minister in his media remarks last week indicated that he, too, favoured an examination of the accord, and hoped that this would be carried out during the coming months.

The question that faces the Senate is: In what manner should the examination be carried out? We have two options: we have the Committee of the Whole, as indicated in the motion; we also have the probability of a joint committee.

Perhaps my interpretation of Senator MacEachen's remarks is not entirely accurate, but I interpreted them the other day as indicating that his party was not in favour of a joint committee. At that time I do not think that Senator MacEachen had an accurate indication that a joint committee would be proposed. However, since that time Senator Murray has indicated that the government is considering a joint committee.

Let me deal briefly with the concept of a Committee of the Whole. It is based on what I call the "codfish concept," where the Senate went into Committee of the Whole to consider the codfish treaty between Canada and France. Despite Senator MacEachen's opinion that the committee was a success, I cannot agree with him on that point. The committee set out and made phone calls by the thousands. In fact, Bell Canada almost had to put in new lines between Ottawa and the maritimes to handle the invitations extended by Senator MacEachen and his group to people to appear before the committee. We have had five committee hearings since February 10, 1987. That is one committee hearing a month—hardly a success! The committee is still floundering around caught in some trawl net, and there is no possibility of the committee's

proceeding and presenting a report before the end of the session.

There are a number of questions that should be asked about the Committee of the Whole. In what manner will it proceed? Who will receive invitations? Will the Senate be thrown open to everyone who wants to come in and criticize the Meech Lake agreement? Will the committee report before the end of the present session? This is a most important question, honourable senators. Those who have been here for a number of years realize that about the middle of June the floodgates open in the House of Commons and we are deluged with legislation. The Senate has often tried to meet this urgency by having pre-studied the legislation coming in at the last minute. However, we are now facing a heavy agenda for the remainder of June. We anticipate considerable debate when the committee reports on Bill C-22. All senators seem to be awaiting that report before proceeding with their arguments. The completion date for Committee of the Whole, therefore, becomes most important.

The House of Commons will be adjourning on July 1, 1987.

An Hon. Senator: Hopefully.

Senator Phillips: However, there is no obligation on the Senate to adjourn at that time. We can continue on and deal with the legislation and study the Meech Lake accord in the Committee of the Whole, if that is the wish of the Senate. I am not advocating that. However, if it is the wish of the Senate, I will be here and hope that other senators will be here also.

Senator MacEachen: If it is the wish of the Senate.

Senator Phillips: Yes, if it is the wish of the Senate. I shall go along with the wishes of the majority.

● (1450)

It is possible that a joint committee and a committee of the whole Senate could co-exist and proceed at the same time. However, it is very likely that a joint committee would be given a date to report back to their respective houses, probably some time in the coming fall. If that were the case, it would be urgent and incumbent upon the Senate to have a similar termination time for its Committee of the Whole. It would be rather ridiculous for the Senate, having participated in a joint committee which has already submitted its report, to continue with its Committee of the Whole. If we follow our usual procedure for the rest of June and meet on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays, we will have six sitting days after the committee is formed. We will lose a day, as is customary, to celebrate Saint Jean Baptiste Day, reducing the number of sitting days to six. It then becomes an impossible task to deal with all the legislation coming in from the other place and to have a committee of the whole Senate on the Meech Lake agreement. Therefore, honourable senators, I propose that if the Committee of the Whole procedure is adopted by the Senate, it meet on Mondays and Fridays. We could begin our sittings at 10 o'clock in the morning, carry on until noon, omit Question Period, and continue on until the evening. That