

in knowing whether the committee plans to schedule the hearing of experts in the wider constitutional field?

Hon. Raymond J. Perrault (Leader of the Government): I do not have that information at my desk, but I shall endeavour to obtain it just as soon as possible. I note, however, that there are some members of the committee present today who represent an information resource.

● (1410)

Senator Guay: Members of the committee could probably tell us.

Senator Asselin: Senator Austin could no doubt tell us.

Senator Roblin: It would be of interest to the Senate to have a list of those who have been in communication with the committee, together with an indication as to whether they wish to submit a brief and appear as witnesses before the committee or merely submit written opinion to the committee. Perhaps that list could also indicate those who will be heard and when it is expected that they will be heard. I would ask my honourable friend to obtain that information for us.

Senator Perrault: Honourable senators, an endeavour will be made to determine the number of requests received for appearances before the committee. However, the Honourable Senator Roblin, who is a member of the committee, may well feel that there would be value in his asking that question of the joint chairmen of the committee when the committee next meets. We should both engage in the pursuit of the desired information.

Senator Roblin: I think that is a reasonable suggestion, and I daresay that the committee will be asked to discuss this matter. It seems to me, however, to be a matter of much wider interest than that. The depth of the subject will be apparent once we determine what the answers to the questions are. I am sure it will be discussed in the committee, but it seems to me that the Senate will have a real interest in this as well.

Hon. David Walker: Honourable senators, many of us get the impression that this Special Joint Committee on the Constitution is very similar to the Tower of Babel. We are all considerably worried about the reputation that is going across the country as a result of the fact that everyone seems so far apart on this patriation question.

Is there any chance of settling with Britain the question of the patriation of the Constitution with an amending formula? And then we can, on our own, go on from there. Anyone other than Prime Minister Trudeau would have agreed to that by now.

Senator Perrault: Honourable senators, as I stated yesterday, the government is awaiting, with keen anticipation, the Report of the Special Joint Committee on the Constitution, along with its recommendations, which may well be attached to that report.

[*Translation*]

SPECIAL JOINT COMMITTEE—PROPOSED EXTENSION OF DEADLINE—CONSULTATION BETWEEN HOUSE LEADERS

Hon. Martial Asselin: Honourable senators, my question is for the Leader of the Government. As Senator Roblin said a

[Senator Roblin.]

while ago, a great number of people want to appear before the Joint Committee of the Senate and the House of Commons on the Constitution.

It is obvious that, because of the enormous task that will have to be done in such a short time, it will be humanly and physically impossible for us to complete our work by December 9.

Moreover, some kind of an understanding seems to be developing among the leaders of the various political parties in the other place, and they would appear to be on the point of agreeing that the committee hearings should be extended for a few weeks so that all those who want to appear can do so and the members of the committee can have the chance to work intelligently.

Can the Leader of the Government tell us what have been the results of the various consultations among the party leaders in the other place in this regard?

[*English*]

Hon. Raymond J. Perrault (Leader of the Government): Honourable senators, I understand that a number of constructive meetings and conversations have been held involving the leadership of the parties in the other place. However, I am not aware of any final decisions to extend the length of the committee's hearings or to extend the number of days in which submissions may be brought before the committee. It is certainly possible, according to the advice I have received, that the committee may wish to bring in an interim report recommending the extension of the sitting time.

Senator Asselin, as a member of the committee, may be in a position to advise the house whether or not some formal proposal will be brought forward again in the joint committee by his party. Certainly a number have spoken in support of extended hearings.

[*Translation*]

Senator Asselin: Honourable senators, I could advise the Leader of the Government in that regard, and of course I do not blame him for not following the proceedings of our joint committee. As early as last week, members of the official opposition, supported by members of the NDP, put to the committee a formal motion asking for permission to present a report to the Senate and the House of Commons recommending that the sitting hours of the committee be extended to February 10, in order, I repeat, to allow the committee members to perform their work like intelligent people.

In addition, for the information of the Leader of the Government in the Senate, I can tell him that members of his political formation, who are in the majority, voted against the motion. Of course, the report could not then be presented to the Senate or the House of Commons.

While I have the floor on this matter, perhaps I could, for once, ask the Leader of the Government why the government is so set on that magic date of December 9. Why not the 20 or the 21? Or later, for that matter? Can he tell us whether or not there is a fundamental reason for the government's insisting that the committee complete its work by December 9? To