

THE SENATE

Thursday, October 11, 1979

The Senate met at 2 p.m., the Speaker in the Chair.
Prayers.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

ACCOMMODATION IN SENATE GALLERY

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, yesterday Senator Peter Bosa directed the following question to the Leader of the Government:

I am wondering whether he, or any other representative of this chamber, regardless of party affiliation, was consulted before 10 seats were taken by the Prime Minister in the gallery in the other place which has traditionally been reserved for senators and their guests.

To which Senator Flynn replied:

I must say, honourable senators, I was not consulted. It was probably done in consultation with the Speaker of the other place. If the honourable senator wishes me to enquire, I shall try to bring in a report eventually.

Because the matter may concern the privileges of the Senate, the Leader of the Government asked me, as your Speaker, to discuss the matter with Mr. Speaker Jerome of the other place.

I am glad to be able to report that Mr. Speaker regrets any wrong impression that may have been created and has asked me to assure honourable senators that there is no intention to generally remove or curtail the traditional courtesy of special seating arrangements for senators wishing to be present at a sitting of that honourable house.

I need hardly remind honourable senators that this is a courtesy arrangement, and not one of special Senate privilege. It is, I would think, in much the same category as the courtesies we extend to visitors in our own galleries.

The particular occasion that may have prompted Senator Bosa's question arose from a request of the Prime Minister for temporary accommodation for his staff and guests at the opening ceremonies.

The reference will be found at page 24 of *Debates of the Senate* for Wednesday, October 10, 1979.

Senator Choquette: Honourable senators, I am glad the question of the Senate gallery in the other place has been raised. My wife tried to sit there yesterday, but it was taken over by the press. If there is a Senate gallery that has always existed, I do not see that it is a privilege for senators to make use of it.

Senator Perrault: Are we to presume, therefore, honourable senators, that the previous arrangements will prevail, and that the same number of Senate guest seats will be available; in

other words, that the Senate gallery arrangements of Tuesday last were only temporary?

The Hon. the Speaker: I do not want to be put in the position of interpreting anything that has been said to me by Mr. Speaker Jerome. Perhaps I might repeat what I have already reported, assuring honourable senators at the same time that the text I read has the approval of Mr. Speaker Jerome.

I said:

I am glad to be able to report that Mr. Speaker regrets any wrong impression that may have been created and has asked me to assure honourable senators that there is no intention to generally remove or curtail the traditional courtesy of special seating arrangements for senators wishing to be present—

He explained what happened on that particular occasion.

In answer to Senator Choquette's question, it is my understanding that actually there is no such thing as a Senate gallery as of right. It is a courtesy that is extended to us. It is my understanding that there is a gallery which senators are traditionally permitted, and indeed, invited, to use on any occasion when the House is sitting.

The situation here is exactly the same, if I may further the analogy. We have in the Senate a press gallery, we have what is known as the Prime Minister's gallery, and we have what is known as the gallery or box of the Speaker of the House of Commons. These are merely courtesies. Nobody has the right or privilege to have these facilities, other than by courtesy, convention and tradition. That is my understanding, and I trust that that explanation is acceptable to honourable senators.

Senator Perrault: I am sure we all appreciate the diligent efforts which have been made by His Honour the Speaker to ascertain the facts of the matter. However, it should be pointed out, perhaps, that the designation "Senate Gallery" does appear on the door to the entrance to this particular area, and I think senators have certainly been under the impression over a number of years that a certain specified number of seats are available for them and their guests.

Senator Smith (Colchester): Honourable senators, I too must express my appreciation of the efforts of His Honour the Speaker and the result thereof, but I cannot help but notice the very careful wording of the statement of the Speaker of the other place in which he uses the words "will generally be available". The phrase "generally will be available" is not of very much significance because it means that on special occasions, which are the times when most people, including senators, want to use the gallery, there is no assurance whatsoever