

mons tonight, and see what happens tomorrow? I am not ready to deal with the bill tonight because I want to study the amendments and also the arguments that have been put forward in the House of Commons this evening.

Senator Buckwold: Honourable senators, as one senator on this side of the house, I have to tell you that I support the Leader of the Opposition. In my view, it is unfair to put the Senate in this position at this hour, when it makes absolutely no difference when this particular bill becomes law.

I am very interested in this bill. I had the privilege of being a Co-Chairman of the Special Joint Committee on Employer-Employee Relations in the Public Service, and I have a real concern about the developments that have taken place so far in the relationships between the Government of Canada and its employees. I would like to be able to understand this bill. I do not think I can do that very well if we are going to debate it from now until 3 o'clock in the morning, especially when it will not affect the end result.

I would like to suggest to the government leader that he consider this situation, and give us the opportunity to review the bill in order to be able to debate it sensibly. I think the stature of the Senate will be enhanced if we give it a much more detailed consideration and review than is possible by rushing it through at midnight.

Senator Perrault: Let me again make it clear that there is no attempt on the part of the government to rush this measure through the Senate with inordinate haste. Honourable senators may choose to debate this issue at any length they desire at this hour, or they may choose to do so later this day.

The government is proceeding only out of consideration—if honourable senators agree, and they may wish to disagree—for our colleagues in the other chamber who have worked throughout the day and who are awaiting our action, and for the Deputy of His Excellency the Governor General who has been waiting for a number of hours to give royal assent.

Senator Flynn: He will go to bed early.

Senator Perrault: If honourable senators are unwilling to provide that kind of accommodation—and that is purely their decision to make—then let them decide, one member of the Senate or any group of honourable senators, that they will not give consent at this hour to the stages necessary for the passage of this measure and the granting of royal assent. There is no suggestion whatsoever that this measure has to be passed in any kind of undue haste. I do not know how many times that must be repeated.

● (0030)

Senator Roblin: The Leader of the Government has now thoroughly confused me. I should like to ask him a couple of questions to see whether he can straighten out my unfortunate situation.

We have been told that there is no pressure on us to depart from normal procedures with respect to this matter. That is not a point that bothers me, because I have been subject to pressure before. What I do not understand is the real reason

[Senator Asselin.]

why we are being asked to proceed with this matter now. If I understand the meaning of clause 11 of the bill, it indicates that no matter what we do now the bill will not come into force on Wednesday. That is clear. It means that no matter whether we deal with it now or later this day, it cannot come into force before Thursday.

If my interpretation of this clause is correct, and if the Honourable Leader of the Government will tell us that he has no intention of amending this particular clause so that it will come into force before Thursday, then I fail to see why we should be asked to deal with it in a rather hasty manner now. It seems to me that we can easily meet later this day, as has been suggested. I for one—and I can only speak for myself—am willing to waive any rule in order to ensure that it not be delayed beyond those few hours so that the effective date will still be Thursday.

I am puzzled as to why we are being asked to deal with this important matter now when it has no practical consequence in terms of the public interest.

I have great respect for our colleagues in the other house and for those who have been told that a certain plan of action might be contemplated. I do not wish to be awkward as far as they are concerned, but we do have a duty to ourselves and to the people of Canada to ensure that we know what we are talking about when we are deliberating this measure.

So if there is no practical consequence in dispensing with immediate action and dealing with this matter tomorrow morning, when we are refreshed and can do so a little more coherently than we can at this time, then I do not understand why we are not adopting that course. It would seem to be the better part of discretion that we do that.

As I say, my honourable friend has me thoroughly confused. I do not know why he is pushing this at this moment when there is no practical consequence to it and when there might be advantage in being able to consider the matter at some leisure.

Senator Perrault: Honourable senator, no one is pushing the Senate to debate this now. If I take from your remarks that you refuse to grant consent to proceed with this bill, there will be no recrimination and it will be debated later this day.

At 9 o'clock this evening there was an urgency and a reasonable expectation that the force of this measure, if given royal assent, would be felt after midnight tonight. By 11 o'clock this evening, with but an hour for debate, the possibility of passage before midnight had become marginal. A question arose whether the proposed measure could be debated and passed in time to take effect as scheduled. As I have said, the principal reason we are here at this hour is to accommodate a great number of individuals who have been severely inconvenienced. However, there will be no attempt by the government to force the Senate to debate this bill at this hour, if honourable senators do not wish to debate it. Let me be clear about that.

Perhaps the sponsor of the bill would like to add a few remarks.