

Perhaps we might have a moment to consider the matter; and if the Senate wishes to extend to us that courtesy, we might have an opportunity to caucus for a few minutes so that we can return and respond to the request.

Senator Roblin: You must first of all get the Hon. the Speaker's ruling. You may not have a problem.

Senator Frith: I am asking for this in order to help the Hon. the Speaker in case he has to make a ruling.

[Translation]

Hon. L. Norbert Thériault: Honourable senators, never in my parliamentary experience have I seen an emergency debate be called at the beginning of a sitting without any prior notice to anyone . . . not even to you, Mr. Speaker.

I too am sorry that the Meech Lake Accord failed. The Prime Minister of Canada and senator Murray announced on Saturday that: "Meech is dead."

I feel it may be a bit late, now that the deal is dead, to call an emergency debate. I would suggest that you take that into consideration.

Hon. Martial Asselin: Honourable senators, to answer my honotable colleague, I would like to say that an emergency debate can start immediately after the events. You are not suggesting that we should have met Saturday or Sunday, are you?

We meet today for the first time since the events took place. That is why it is urgent that we discuss them.

If we wait until tomorrow to request an emergency debate, the answer we will get is: "It is too late; you should have requested it yesterday." So, senator David requested it today. He requests that the debate be held immediately because the events are recent and emergency debates are allowed immediately after such events.

Senator Thériault: Are there any precedents?

Senator Asselin: It is clear that my colleague's argument is not valid.

Senator Thériault: Are there any precedents?

Hon. Jacques Flynn: What are you afraid of?

Senator Asselin: Last year, Senator Grafstein raised the same question during an emergency debate about some issue I cannot recall at this time. He was granted his emergency debate. Why should the Senate deny Senator David an opportunity to discuss the important issue we were confronted with last weekend, and which is likely to have a tremendous impact on the future of our country.

I suggest that permission should be granted.

Senator Guay: Mr. Bourassa insisted that we should leave the matter alone, honourable senators!

Hon. Louis J. Robichaud: Honourable senators, Item No. 19 on our Orders of the Day might help us solve this problem. It says:

. . . calling the attention of the Senate to the debate and process concerning the Meech Lake Accord.

[Senator Frith.]

The Meech Lake Accord, whether dead or alive, is Item No. 19 on our Orders of the Day, so that all those who want to debate this item should be free to do so.

I wonder about the emergency. When we get to Item No. 19 of the Orders of the Day, all will be allowed to rise to deal with it.

Hon. Jean-Maurice Simard: Mr. Speaker, honourable senators, I suggest that if we were to accept Senator Robichaud's suggestion, all senators who have already dealt with this item would be excluded.

Senator Thériault: You, for instance!

Senator Simard: Listen! Either we dealt with this issue or we did not. There is no need for you to get upset, Senator Thériault! We know that you are quite nervous after having elected Mr. Chrétien and I can understand why the Liberal Party is uptight.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Senator Simard: On the same issue, there is indeed another item, following Senator Chaput-Rolland's Notice of Inquiry.

Honourable senators will agree, I think, when I say that Senator Robichaud's suggestion was well intended.

In view of its very nature and without having to go through the whole Question Period and Orders of the Day, I suggest that Liberal senators would show again their good faith by accepting to start this afternoon sitting by dealing with Senator David's motion.

Senator Thériault: No!

[English]

Hon. Philippe Deane Gigantès: Honourable senators, I should like to say, without committing myself, that, obviously, there are people in this chamber whose role in the recent events was such that they have to begin rewriting history as quickly as possible. Therefore, I would support an emergency debate in order to give them the opportunity to twist the facts, and us the opportunity to straighten them out!

Senator Frith: Honourable senators, as I said, the rule that applies is the one that provides that no notice is required. Rule 46(g), on page 17, reads:

No notice is required of the following motions:

(g) for the adjournment of the Senate for the purposes of raising a matter of urgent public importance (which the mover shall state on rising to speak) before the House proceeds to the Orders of the Day;

In a sense, the motion is out of order, since it ought to have come before we proceeded to Orders of the Day. However, I think Senator Robichaud's suggestion is worthy of consideration, namely, that we can debate the matter as long as we wish under an order that already appears on the order paper. Therefore, I renew my request to the Senate, that we rise for a period of 15 to 20 minutes in order to caucus on the question.

Senator Simard: You had better call Mr. Trudeau while you are at it!