

Another difficulty I faced was that, although we could have gone on for another half hour, unfortunately there was no member of the opposition present at that time in the committee. Therefore, I felt I had to act quickly and ask the deputy minister to attend at a further meeting. I do apologize, but it was just at the dinner hour. I hope that I will be forgiven and that you will allow me to hold the meeting tomorrow.

● (2020)

Hon. Paul C. Lafond: Honourable senators, I apologize for being absent from the chamber for approximately one-and-a-half minutes when this question was raised. I gather that the question concerns a delay in the commencement of the meeting of the Standing Senate Committee on Health, Welfare and Science this afternoon.

Senator Frith: Honourable senators, I was asked to move a motion to permit the Health, Welfare and Science Committee to meet at 4 o'clock tomorrow afternoon, even if the Senate is sitting at that time. I received the message about a half an hour before we convened this evening, and I assumed that the Clerk would have followed the point raised by Senator Smith and asked Senator Lafond for clearance, because it has been agreed, that all committee meetings, ordinary and extraordinary, would be cleared through his co-ordinating office. It seems that there has been a bit of a contretemps here, and the matter was not cleared with Senator Lafond's office. That is the background to what we are discussing at present.

I was given leave to move the motion, I explained it, and we are now discussing whether the motion should be adopted.

Senator Lafond: Honourable senators, as it happened, there were two contretemps. The first contretemps occurred this afternoon. I should have known that the Standing Senate Committee on Health, Welfare and Science was meeting at 4 o'clock. However, because of my absence since Thursday evening on other business, I was not aware of this, and I apologize for carrying on the meeting of the Subcommittee on National Defence until 4.05 p.m. I can say that it will not happen again.

The second contretemps occurred the moment that meeting was over because I left the premises and if anyone had wanted to reach me within the next few hours, I was not available. In any event, I gather that the matter is resolved and that the committee has permission to sit at 4 o'clock tomorrow afternoon.

Senator Smith may have stated as much before I entered the chamber for the second time, but I believe that the committee chairmen have agreed to put to the leadership of the Senate on both sides the proposal that in order to help with committee scheduling it should be more or less routine for one committee—if need be, a designated committee—to sit at 3.30 on Wednesday afternoons. When I say "designated", I mean on a first-come-first-served basis.

Senator Frith: Honourable senators, we have not implemented the suggestion that a committee have the automatic right to sit on Wednesday afternoons. The question now is

whether the explanation, quite properly asked for by Senator Smith, is sufficient to show that there was an attempt to give proper notification. Senator Lafond has said that he would not have been able to deal with the matter of that kind of notice because he was not available. So the question is whether, such permission not having been given in advance, there has been sufficient explanation for the Senate to agree to this motion.

Hon. Robert Muir: Honourable senators, with all due deference to Senators Smith, Lafond and Bird, it was through my efforts, with the co-operation of all honourable senators, that Bill C-78 was brought before the committee. Senator Bird very kindly presided over the committee, and we worked hard at dealing with the legislation.

Perhaps I did not hear Senator Bird correctly, but I believe she said that no representative of the opposition was present at the meeting. I was there until the meeting finished. However, if a senator who is a member of the Liberal Party would like to continue the meeting of the committee in order to obtain further information—and there was one—then he has every right to demand that. We hope to conclude our business tomorrow so that the bill may be passed as quickly as possible. I hope I have shed some light on the situation.

● (2025)

Hon. Andrew Thompson: Honourable senators, it is not my wish to prolong this matter, but I think I was the person who asked that the meeting be adjourned. Senator Muir expressed the hope that we could continue, although he did not mention that fact in this chamber just now.

We have dealt with Part I of the bill, and two parts remain to be dealt with.

In fairness to the deputy chairman of the committee, there are still many questions we would like to ask on this bill, and perhaps that could be done tomorrow.

Senator Smith: Honourable senators, it is certainly not my wish to cause any difficulties for this committee, but I must say that, as chairman of a committee, I have encountered many such difficulties. I thought we had disposed of the likelihood of any such difficulties occurring in the future as a result of our meeting last week.

I heard Senator Lafond, for whom I have the greatest respect—as I have, of course, for Senator Bird and the other senators who have spoken—and, in the circumstances, as long as Senator Lafond is satisfied I have no complaint to make.

Motion agreed to.

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

MEETING OF SPECIAL JOINT COMMITTEE—QUESTION OF PRIVILEGE

Hon. H. A. Olson (Minister of State for Economic Development): Honourable senators, I ask Senator Murray if, in setting up the meeting of the Special Joint Committee on Official Languages, which he referred to earlier, he followed the procedures that were explained a few moments ago.