

Senator Perrault: We are trying to make this point, and I appeal over the heads of certain senators who sit on the other side.

Senator Tremblay: Yes, what is the point?

Senator Perrault: We are saying that because certain members of the other chamber are unwilling to participate in joint committee meetings as long as the House of Commons fails to record the division commenced on March 2 the joint committees should not meet. The bell is ringing.

Senator Flynn: And we know the bell is going to continue to ring.

Senator Perrault: We do not know how long it is going to continue to ring; that is admitted. We say that on—

● (2100)

Senator Tremblay: May I correct what the Leader of the Government is saying? I have never heard any bell—

Senator Perrault: Let me conclude what I have to say, and then, with great respect, I will listen to the honourable senator. Let me quote the authority cited by certain members in the other place. Any of us may agree or disagree with their interpretation, and any of us may agree or disagree with their motives, but they cite page 617 of Erskine May's *Parliamentary Practice*, Nineteenth Edition.

Senator Smith: What does he say about the Senate?

Senator Perrault: The honourable senator is becoming more and more of a nuisance when efforts are being made to explain some of these points.

Senator Smith: I am always a nuisance when I do not agree with the Leader of the Government.

Senator Perrault: There is a difference between being a gadfly and a plain mosquito, and tonight the honourable senator is being a mosquito.

Senator Smith: There is a difference between being bombastic and being sensible, and I will say which you are—

Senator Perrault: Perhaps the honourable senator will give me time to read the reference. I believe that he may be frightened that something may be brought forward which will discredit his party's position.

Senator Smith: Do you think I have not read it before?

Senator Perrault: The senator suggested earlier that he did not know any reference existed, so I am bringing it to his attention. His memory must be failing. I would ask the Leader of the Opposition to discipline his senators a little more effectively.

Senator Flynn: I could not achieve the same efficiency as you do, that's obvious.

Senator Perrault: Is the Leader of the Opposition rising on a point of privilege?

Senator Flynn: Yes, because you have asked me to discipline my members; but I am not able to do the same as you in this

[Senator Smith.]

respect. It's so obvious. You see that they all listen to you religiously.

Senator Perrault: The Leader of the Opposition has taken his place—I hope. Let me read the reference:

When a division is called in the House, the chairman of a standing committee must suspend its proceedings for such time as will, in his opinion, enable members to vote in the division and return to the Committee.

Some Hon. Senators: Hear, hear.

Senator Perrault: That is what it says.

Senator Smith: What does it say about the Senate?

Senator Perrault: Until they vote, certain Commons members believe that sittings of committees should be suspended. That is the viewpoint taken by some of our fellow parliamentarians in the other chamber. The point to be made is that whether one agrees or disagrees with the position those members have taken, it is grossly unfair and undemocratic to purport to have a meeting of a joint committee when certain members will not attend those committee meetings because of important procedural opinions. It is, for some of them, obviously a matter of conscience.

Senator Flynn: How does it apply to senators?

Senator Perrault: According to Senator Flynn, meetings of joint committees, under these circumstances, may be legal, but it is not in the tradition of parliamentary democracy to have unrepresentative joint committees proceed. To do so is against convention and tradition. If we were in a situation similar to the one they are in in the other place, I believe that many of us would resent very much a joint committee's proceeding to hear witnesses and taking decisions without the presence of a number of honourable senators. We are appealing on the basis of fair play. We are basing our view on tradition and convention, and, yes, on this reference from Erskine May. Surely, it is a matter of dealing fairly with the other chamber and attempting to expedite the work of our committees in a democratic fashion.

Senator Nurgitz: Honourable senators, I have a supplementary to the question I asked initially. After all that has been said by the Leader of the Government and by Erskine May, joint committees cannot sit while the bell rings because it is a discourtesy, it is unconventional and unparliamentary—is that what the Leader of the Government has said?

Senator Perrault: The view expressed is that they should not meet, under the circumstances. It is a matter of one's perception of what the parliamentary system should involve.

Senator Nurgitz: I thank the Leader of the Government for his answer and perhaps I might even agree with it. Can he tell me why the Joint Committee on Regulations and other Statutory Instruments, with a joint chairman of my party from the other house, sat last Thursday while the bell was ringing?

Senator Guay: Because Senator Godfrey does not know any better.