

Committee's responsibility is to prepare and submit a responsible report that will take into consideration the evidence brought before that Committee where we had the privilege of looking at the matter of Senate reform. The January 31 deadline does not leave us enough time, so that we will have to ask the Senate for an extension. No attempt should be made to limit the debates of the future members of that committee by saying that they must proceed rapidly and that they will have to sit three days next week. In any event, the Senate will not sit next week. Will this committee have to sit? The question is relevant because the senators who will sit on the committee do have other things to do and will not be able to attend regularly. It is unrealistic to think that we will be able to complete the proceedings before January 31. Right now, we ought to select a later date, possibly April 30. We would be rested and have time to consider every aspect of the work we have to do before producing an intelligent report.

**Hon. Jean-Paul Deschatelets:** I want to ask a question to Senator Frith. You mention the date of January 31 in your motion, but I suspect it was not your decision. It must have been decided by the co-chairman of the joint committee who undoubtedly had something to say about picking the date of January 31. Would Senator Molgat comment on that?

**Hon. Gildas L. Molgat:** Honourable senators, I am pleased to answer the question. When I made that suggestion on behalf of the committee last week and recommended that the committee be struck as early as possible at the beginning of this new session, I did say that it was not a decision of the co-chairmen. It was taken by the steering committee. It was later approved by the whole committee and the members asked the co-chairmen to intervene and seek an extension. We discussed the matter with the minister responsible, Mr. MacGuigan, and reported to our committee that the position of Mr. MacGuigan was that the government was anxious to have the recommendations of the committee. The government wants to submit proposals to the first ministers' conference scheduled for March, I believe. It is not a government decision. Since it is a joint committee of the Senate and the House of Commons, it is the responsibility of both houses, to make the necessary decisions. Mr. MacGuigan told us that he did not have any objection to the date proposed for producing our report, at the end of January, but he would have preferred an earlier date. We consulted our colleagues and the other parties in the House. It was agreed to ask for an extension until January 31. The committee has scheduled its agenda so as to complete its work by that date. In fact, we did try to set an earlier date. We were hoping to table the report in both Houses when they meet after the Christmas recess. We opted for January 31 so as to have more time.

Of course, we had no idea that in the meantime we would have a holiday last week, or when the Houses would meet again. We had to make a decision, although we did not know exactly what would happen. We have set our agenda. The committee was unable to sit during the holiday because it did not exist.

I thank my colleagues for getting together this morning to speed up the work of our committee. It was an informal meeting since we did not exist yet as a committee. Some senators have complained that we have not had enough time, in view of the few days off we had recently. Yet, when I made that suggestion last week, I indicated that our committee would strive to complete its study before the set date. Because of the problems, we could not make any promise. I feel that my current remarks are consistent with those of Senator Asselin. Evidently I cannot be the co-chairman of this committee, for it does not exist yet. Its members have not yet been selected either. We will allow all those who have views to express them before the committee. Should we not be able to fulfill our mandate by a determined date, we would return to this house to seek a new extension. I would ask the Government House Leader to make other arrangements. If our committee could be reinstated forthwith, we would get back to work immediately.

**Hon. Arthur Tremblay:** Honourable senators, let me contribute a few remarks to clearly identify the problem. We have been told in committee that in order for the report to be printed by the end of January, it must be delivered to the printers a month before, that is to say before the Christmas recess. How long have we left to complete this report? We only have two days left, unless we sit next week. If we do sit at the same time as the Senate, there are December 20 and 21 left. This morning, we dealt unofficially with the project prepared by the committee staff. So far, we have considered what amounts to two out of eight chapters. I should add that one of the chapters was straightforward, dealing with the schedule of the committee. This morning we started to examine a somewhat controversial chapter, but we have not finished it. We feel almost as much time will be required for the six remaining chapters. Should things go as well as they did this morning, we will probably need three days of full time study to complete the study of the six chapters remaining. We have only two days left. It is therefore physically impossible for the report to be printed and tabled in the houses before the end of January. You would not be dealing realistically with this issue if you did not take this fact into account. Accordingly the time limit of January 31st should be postponed. We need to be given enough time to conscientiously fulfill our mandate.

● (1440)

[English]

**Hon. Charles McElman:** Honourable senators, it seems to me that we are permitting—in this Parliament as well as in some of the provincial legislatures—governments to put the cart before the horse. The government should come before Parliament requesting deadlines instead of setting them. Instead of having Parliament meet the schedules of the government, I think it is time that the government met the schedule of Parliament. Parliament is supreme, not the government.

If it is not convenient for a federal-provincial conference to await Parliament, then that is their problem, not Parliament's.

When the Standing Senate Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs undertook its study of the first amendment to