

conference on a document if the press has not had a chance to read it—and by that time the document would have been tabled in the Senate chamber. The intention was to table the document here ahead of the press conference. As I said, the only reason that did not happen was that there was a mistake in the order of reports of committees.

Senator Thériault: I am not seeking to attach blame, but I attach great importance to the fact that a document was distributed to the press, even on a “lock-up” basis, with the time factor being 2 o’clock. I heard the Deputy Leader of the Opposition saying that the press conference was called for 2 o’clock.

Senator Roblin: That is what I was told.

Senator Thériault: I have been in this chamber for only a very short time, but it is my experience—and I think all senators will agree—that when the Senate is scheduled to meet at 2 o’clock in the afternoon, it infrequently does so because certain formalities must take place beforehand. I am not seeking to attach blame, but as one who sat in a legislature for a number of years, I would humbly suggest that in future we should be very careful in matters of this type.

● (1440)

Senator Macquarrie: Honourable senators, what I want to say is not contradictory to the honourable senator, my colleague from New Brunswick, but I was inclined to ask what senators were asked to attend at a “lock-up,” if I may use that irreligious expression. I might point out that on matters of the Bank Act, I trust the distinguished chairman of the committee, and Senator Walker and others, but had I known that the Constitution matter was going to emerge full-blown I would like to have been there, but no one gave me a chance to be there. I think I have the same feeling that Senator Thériault had, that perhaps we might be a little more sensitive in these matters. I was glad to hear Senator Hayden, because he knows more about the Bank Act than anyone else in Canada, but I would have been at the lock-up on the Constitution if anyone had invited me there. I don’t know what good I would have done but I would like to have been asked.

Senator Goldenberg: I want the honourable senator to know that the chairman of the committee was not locked up himself.

Senator Frith: The record should show that all observations which have been made will be taken into account. I do want to underline the fact that the plan called for the constitutional document to be tabled in the chamber before the time set for the press conference, but when the item “Reports of Committees” was called, Senator Hayden was up and speaking on the Bank Act.

Senator Asselin: It was your business to have stopped him.

Senator Frith: Exactly. As Senator Asselin has said, at that point it was my business to have stopped Senator Hayden. That is why I said earlier that if any blame is to be attached, it is mine, and I apologize to the Senate for what happened.

Senator Asselin: We will move a vote of non-confidence.

Senator Frith: Senator Asselin is going to move a vote of non-confidence, and we will have to see what comes of that. In any event, that is the story of how this contretemps—which I think is the right word—took place.

Senator Macquarrie: The government leader was procedurally wrong but strategically right.

Senator Smith: Honourable senators, I would like to make an observation in line with certain questions I asked the chairman of this committee a few days ago about the extraordinary delay in bringing this report before any body, whether it be the press or anyone else. I remember my resentment about being hurried with the work of this committee away back in July and August on the pretext that it was of the greatest importance, in order that the report would have the utmost beneficial effect, that it be ready for release, first, before the First Ministers’ Conference; then immediately after that conference, and then finally before Parliament resumed. The First Ministers’ Conference began on September 8, if my memory is right, and Parliament resumed on October 6. It is now November 26, and the last meeting of the committee took place many weeks ago.

Senator Goldenberg: October 30; less than a month ago.

Senator Smith: Even that was many weeks ago; and if the last meeting was not held until October 30, then that in itself was a pretty poor show. I want to register my feeling that there was no excuse for hurrying and hasseling the committee to get this work done quickly to meet what was represented to be a most important need, to have the report released when it would do the most good, only to have it finally released at the end of November and in circumstances which seem to be less than happy so far as the Senate is concerned.

[*Translation*]

Senator Frith: Honourable senators, I wish to give notice, for Senator Lamontagne, that next Tuesday, December 2, 1980, he will call the attention of the Senate to the Report of the Standing Senate Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs on “Certain Aspects of the Canadian Constitution,” tabled in the Senate today.

Senator Asselin: With your permission, honourable senators, I would like to indicate that so long as the Joint Committee on the Constitution is sitting, a number of senators, who must attend the sittings of that committee, will be unable to take part in the debate which is scheduled for next Tuesday. Approximately ten senators will have to go to the sittings of the Joint Commons-Senate Committee and will therefore be unable to hear Senator Lamontagne. Naturally, I like to read Senator Lamontagne’s speeches but I much prefer listening to him. Therefore, some honourable senators will be deprived of the right to hear Senator Lamontagne express his views on the report before us.

In all fairness to the senators who must attend the sittings of the Joint Committee on the Constitution, I think the discussion should be postponed until some other day or time when all senators could be here.