

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Friday, December 30, 1988

The House met at 4.40 p.m.

Prayers

[*English*]

MESSAGE FROM THE SENATE

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): I have the honour to inform the House that a message has been received from the Senate informing this House that the Senate have passed Bill C-2, an Act to implement the Free Trade Agreement between Canada and the United States of America, without amendment.

THE ROYAL ASSENT

[*English*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): I have the honour to inform the House that a communication has been received as follows:

Rideau Hall,
Ottawa,

30 December, 1988

Sir,

I have the honour to inform you that the Honourable Antonio Lamer, Puisne Judge of the Supreme Court of Canada, in his capacity as Deputy Governor General, will proceed to the Senate Chamber today, the 30th day of December, 1988, at 4.45 p.m., for the purpose of giving Royal Assent to a Bill.

Yours sincerely,
Léopold H. Amyot
Secretary to the Governor General

[*Translation*]

POINT OF ORDER

MR. PRUD'HOMME—QUORUM IN HOUSE

Mr. Marcel Prud'homme (Saint-Denis): Mr. Speaker, I wish to raise a point of order.

For many years, I have tried to follow the Standing Orders very closely. There is a very clear rule regarding the quorum. There are exceptions, so I would ask my colleagues not to get too excited about it. There are exceptions! But we must still clearly follow the Standing Orders!

We have been summoned, the bells have rung. We were proceeding as for a real sitting of the House, because you said the customary prayers for a real sitting of the House.

I would like to submit the case to you, so that in future we can deal with this question in the committee that considers the Standing Orders and clarify this matter completely. I have always objected to the House sitting without a quorum.

There is only one exception that I could find in the Standing Orders that can justify our sitting today. We suspended the sitting and the House receives a message from the Governor General or her deputy, one of the nine judges of the Supreme Court, to the effect that there will be a special sitting in the Senate for the purpose of giving Royal Assent. Citation 215 of Beauchesne says that when we receive a message from the Governor General asking us to go to the Senate for Royal Assent, that means we can sit regardless of the number of Members present. I can go along with that.

But it is not clear; when the bells ring, we are not aware that we have just received a message. Given this lack of clarity in our Standing Orders, I submit to you—I do not want to be difficult today; I know that everyone is eager to go—that confusion arises. We might one day have great difficulty because of this ambiguity in the Standing Orders.

I take the opportunity to point this out today, because what we are going to the other House for is very important. And since it is very important, we should make quite sure that everything has been done legally.

Therefore I submit to you again that when we were called, Mr. Speaker, we should have . . . And now, I see that you are receiving notices . . . or you should have sat in the Clerk's chair and waited to receive the message from the Governor General. In such a case, the Standing