

we cannot do something, unfortunately, we cannot do it, because there are more of them than there are of us. That is what happened. To say that we missed the opportunity is just eyewash.

Hon. Royce Frith (Deputy Leader of the Opposition): Honourable senators, perhaps I can deal with Senator David's question. He asked for an explanation. Perhaps he did not hear what we said. Let me say it again.

We did not refuse to have this matter debated today. We voted against a motion to have it debated immediately because there was on the order paper an order dealing with this issue. We have had other emergency debates. Urgency of debate is the reason for such a debate; the fact that there is no other opportunity to deal with it. In other urgency debates we have had there was nothing else on the order paper dealing with the subject.

Therefore, there was no refusal to have this matter debated. It just did not come within the rules for immediate debate. Senator David does not have to agree with me, but I am saying that that is what we decided. We did not adjourn the Senate to deal with the matter immediately but said that it could be dealt with when we reached the order on the order paper, which comes up after Question Period and government business; that is all. It is going to be debated. It is just a matter of its not falling within the rules for immediate debate.

[Translation]

Senator David: My question of privilege, honourable senators, is simply about procedure. If you are logical, Senator Frith, you could have simply accepted my emergency motion and you could have asked the speakers all your questions and the arguments were being made.

We have been talking about Meech Lake for two hours. You have spent an hour of that debating some of your own caucus business of which I am ignorant. The debate could probably be over now although it has not even started. That is, you began it with a question period that so far has dealt only with the subject on which I asked for an emergency debate.

Senator Frith: I understand why Senator David who moved the motion is frustrated because he could not start right away.

The only thing we insisted on is that it not be done right away but later. That means the other business of the Senate, including question period, would be dealt with in order.

● (1630)

[English]

Senator Steuart: Honourable senators, I do not disagree with my deputy leader very often, but I would like to ask Senator Murray, who knew this was coming, I presume, this question: Had we voted in favour of the motion to adjourn, how would we then have debated the matter? The house would have adjourned. You can get up, Senator Flynn—you do not have to slump down in your seat. Get up and tell us how we would have then debated the matter.

Senator Flynn: Nobody would have acted as stupidly as you have! We would have reverted to Orders of the Day.

[Senator Roblin.]

Senator Steuart: You voted to adjourn.

Senator Flynn: Yes, to consider a motion. Don't be so stupid!

[Translation]

FAILURE OF MEECH LAKE ACCORD—ACTIONS OF MINISTER OF STATE FOR FEDERAL-PROVINCIAL RELATIONS—EFFECT ON MANITOBA LEADERS

Hon. Gildas Molgat: Honourable senators, after this point of order, I would like to revert to my question.

Hon. Jacques Flynn: Do you act as Deputy Speaker now?

Senator Molgat: No, as a senator, just like you, Senator Flynn. I am sometimes demandless of the House than you do, but anyway! My question is directed again to Senator Murray. [English]

I simply want to verify your answer to Senator Olson. Is it correct that you, as a minister of the Crown representing the government, advised, requested, and demanded that the government ignore its rules and simply go past any rules of the Manitoba legislature? Is that correct?

Hon. Lowell Murray (Leader of the Government and Minister of State for Federal-Provincial Relations): Honourable senators, on the contrary. I asked them whether it was possible to invoke closure. Closure is a rule. Closure is provided for under the rules of most legislatures. I asked them whether it was possible to have the debate, to bring the matter to a vote and hold their hearings in Committee of the Whole, as has been done here. On those matters I was told that, no, it was not possible, or at any rate it was not desirable, and there the matter rested. It was not an overly-long conversation I had with the three party leaders in Manitoba.

Senator Molgat: Is it not correct, Senator Murray, that you knew all along what the rules of the Manitoba house were? They were clear. I reminded you in the Senate on at least one occasion, if not several, that you could not wait until the last minute so far as the Manitoba situation was concerned because of a problem that had arisen some years ago on the question of language rights. The Manitoba legislature had agreed to some Senate rules, which were clear and precise. You knew that. The government knew that. Why, then, would you come at the last minute to say on behalf of the senior government to the Manitoba legislature, "Go past the rules that you have agreed to within a matter of five years. Don't pay any attention to them. We have known about them all along, but don't pay any attention to them."?

Senator Murray: Honourable senators, it was not I, on June 9, who signed a document on behalf of the Government of Manitoba committing it to make every possible effort, I think the phrase was, to have the matter decided upon by June 23. Indeed, Premier Filmon, I believe, added an asterisk such that the decision was subject to the public-hearing process. He must have signed that—I know he did—in good faith and in the full expectation that there was sufficient time to have his debate, to hold his public hearings, and to have the decision made by June 23.