

Senator MacDonald: Yes.

Senator Sinclair: I did not feel that it was my place to explain to Barbara Frum the British North America Act, parliamentary procedures and so on. I did not consider that to be the time to do so.

Senator MacDonald: I agree. As a matter of fact, I was trying to make it clear that I was somewhat frustrated that you were unable to make your point. The fact that she would say "But you are appointed," indicates that hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of people are starting to miss the entire point. That is why I return to my original point and say that I do not believe that these past few weeks have been the greatest weeks in the history of this assembly, and, since this is my first month here, I do not particularly like to begin my appointment in this particular way.

In conclusion, I would say that those senators who have chosen to fight this bill on a matter of principle cannot but be admired, even though, in this instance—

The Hon. the Speaker pro tempore: I am sorry to interrupt the honourable senator, but it is now six o'clock and, according to our rules, I have to leave the Chair. We shall resume the sitting at eight o'clock.

Senator Roblin: Your Honour, that is indeed the rule and you are quite proper to invoke it. However, I believe the honourable senator has only a few sentences, or perhaps a paragraph, left to conclude his speech. If he promises not to go beyond the next five minutes or so, I am sure that we would be disposed to hear him now rather than interrupt him in his concluding remarks.

The Hon. the Speaker pro tempore: Is it agreed, honourable senators?

Hon. Senators: Agreed.

Senator MacDonald: Honourable senators, I believe that I can conclude what I wish to say in less than one minute. An enormous amount of political capital has been expended on this matter, on the part of ministers of the Crown, of honourable senators and others. I get the impression, from my briefings, that some important matters lie ahead of us for which all of the political capital that we have will be required. I believe that the amount of political capital that has been exhausted on this matter has been disproportionate, and I hope that we can get on with passing this bill.

Some Hon. Senators: Hear, hear.

Senator Gigantès: Your Honour, may I request that the debate be adjourned until eight o'clock in my name?

The Hon. the Speaker pro tempore: I will now leave the Chair until eight o'clock.

The Senate adjourned.

● (2000)

At 8 p.m. the sitting was resumed.

Hon. Philippe Deane Gigantès: Honourable senators, I would like to take this opportunity, though it seems to be a digression from the debate, to congratulate Senator Mac-

Donald on his maiden speech. In fact, it is pertinent to the debate to do so because here is a reasonable man, a gentleman, a decent man, urbane, witty, civilized and admirable. I wish some of the others were like him. They were not. We have heard this evening one of our colleagues say to another senator that if he kept his seat it would be gentility. We have heard threats, which in Tory terms constitute civility.

Senator Nurgitz: What do you know?

Senator Gigantès: We have been told that one should respect this house. I ask the senators on the Tory side if there is any greater form of disrespect than to use threats against people who disagree with your views.

Let us review the facts a little. I shall not repeat at length what my distinguished colleagues have said. We were given a convincing demonstration by Senator Stewart that what we are dealing with is a principle for which the Tory party has fought, and fought hard, in the other place; and not just any members of the Tory party, but the very members of the Tory party who are now asking us to retreat from that principle. We heard Senator Stewart, following Senator Sinclair, say that it is perfectly normal and reasonable to ask that we see the Main Estimates, just to determine whether something untoward and unacceptable has been included. When you go to get your driver's licence, you are asked for a certificate of insurance and they will not give the driver's licence to you until you have shown the certificate. You cannot merely say that you will call or that you will show it to them next week. You have to show it first.

We have been told by Tory senators that there are financial dangers the country is running because of the obduracy of us Liberals. If we accept that the Prime Minister, the Right Honourable Brian Mulroney, and the Minister of Finance, the Honourable Michael Wilson, have the welfare of the country at heart—and I accept that—then it seems to me that, if there really were a danger, they would have accepted the Liberal compromise. They would have accepted the NDP amendment long ago to avoid those dangers. If they did not accept that compromise, which was along the lines they have fought so hard to establish in the past, then the only conclusion must be that they did not really believe that there was any danger.

We are told that we must abandon this principle. The first reason given is that we are costing the taxpayers money. However, the government knew what it was planning to do before we broke for Christmas. The Honourable Leader of the Government in the Senate could have approached the Honourable Leader of the Opposition in the Senate and told him then what the government plans were. I am sure that the Honourable Leader of the Opposition in the Senate would have informed the Honourable Leader of the Government in the Senate before Christmas that we would oppose this bill in its present form, that we would not want to pass Part II before seeing the estimates. Then the government could have split the bill. There is no likelihood that they would have had trouble splitting it and there would not have been a long debate because splitting it would have meant accepting the views of