

I express any objections. So I want to be clear about that. On reflection, however, there are a couple of points I would like to bring to the attention of honourable senators.

First of all, from a procedural point of view, the report was issued to outsiders before we got it. That, of course, is a happenstance of the proceedings of this house, as a result of which we did not receive the report from the committee chairman until ten minutes to three. We also have a situation where an extensive explanation of the report is being offered elsewhere before it is offered here.

Without wishing to make too much of this situation, I do suggest to the Leader of the Government, and others, that on another occasion when a report is being tabled we might arrange our timing a little differently so that the Senate is given first crack at it rather than have it displayed, as is happening now, outside this chamber in the first instance.

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear.

Senator Goldenberg: Honourable senators, if I may comment on what Senator Roblin has just said, I have to say that I did not make any arrangements about the press conference. I knew there was going to be one, because that was suggested and agreed upon at one of the committee meetings. The last meeting was on October 30.

Senator Lamontagne told me yesterday at the meeting of the Joint Committee on the Constitution, of which both Senator Roblin and I are members, that he had spoken to Senator Roblin and had arranged with him that both would appear at a press conference. I did not know about the time of the conference, but he assured me that Senator Roblin had agreed to attend the press conference and participate in it.

Senator Roblin: I certainly accept my honourable friend's statement without question. The matter of my appearance was certainly discussed, but in my view it was left up in the air. Anyway, I did not go, as you can see.

My point is that I am not really complaining about a press conference. It is wise to give substantial distribution to the work we do. That is fine. My remarks are addressed merely to the question of the timing. It would be better if we were a little more conscious of the propriety of dealing with the matter in this house first, before giving it first publicity.

Senator Macquarrie: Honourable senators, I would just like to say that, being one of the quietest members of this august body, my applause and enthusiasm a few moments ago was directed towards and in appreciation of the distinguished chairman, not in reference to the procedure that was adopted.

Senator Frith: Honourable senators, we are in this position. As honourable senators know, when a report comes from a committee it can either be presented for adoption or tabled and dealt with under an Inquiry or otherwise. I understand the committee agreed to table the report and then proceed by way of an Inquiry. There is then a difficulty with reference to the timing in order to meet the objectives that everyone seems to agree with, namely, to have the document widely circulated, and at the same time make sure that the press or others do not get first crack at it, to use Senator Roblin's words.

[Senator Roblin.]

• (1435)

Senator Asselin: But they did get first crack at it.

Senator Frith: You are quite correct; in a sense they did. The committee did its work, and I understand that it opted to proceed in this manner. There was some contretemps as far as timing was concerned because of the fact that Senator Goldenberg was to speak before Senator Hayden. That would have at least reduced the time gap. It was a mistake that Senator Hayden proceeded first.

The plan, as I understood it and as understood by the committee, was to proceed by way of an Inquiry. Accordingly, I propose almost immediately to give notice, in Senator Lamontagne's name, of an Inquiry for Tuesday next when the Senate can and will, of course, proceed with it.

There was only one other way, it seems to me, to have proceeded. That was not to have released the report until after the Inquiry had proceeded. That was the alternative. This report is the result of very important work done by the Senate committee, and the advantage of proceeding in the way we did is that the tabling of the report and the press conference will attract the attention of the public before the Inquiry is proceeded with.

This is not to say it could not have been done any other way, but this is the procedure that I thought the committee had agreed upon, so that the public and the press could see the report almost coincidentally with the Senate. The fact that Senator Hayden rose to table his report before Senator Goldenberg tabled his, thus switching the order of the presentation of reports, resulted in a delay of approximately three-quarters of an hour. That was not in the plan.

Senator Thériault: Do I understand that the report just presented was distributed to the press, and that a press conference was held before this document was tabled in this chamber?

Senator Frith: It was, but that was not the intention. As I said, the plan, as set out in the Clerk's Scroll, was for Senator Goldenberg to table his committee's report immediately before Senator Hayden tabled his report. The press conference on Senator Goldenberg's report was to take place at approximately 2.15 o'clock this afternoon. The distribution for the lock-up took place ahead of that time, which is the procedure followed when the budget and other such material is presented to Parliament. The half-hour lead time for the press conference resulted simply because Senator Hayden presented his report first.

Senator Asselin: It is not his fault.

Senator Frith: Of course not; I am not blaming anyone. If it is a matter of blame, I ought to have tugged Senator Hayden and said, "Wait for Senator Goldenberg." If what we are searching for, honourable senators, is blame, I will take the blame. But if we are talking about what the plan was and whether there was an intended discourtesy to the Senate, the plan was that there would be distribution, as is often the case, with an embargo to 2.15. The press conference would then take place at 2.15—there is not much point in having a press