

members should be commended for the effort that they have put into this. Therefore, I think it is reasonable for them to ask for an extension.

I have to say that I think January 31—whatever other problems they may run into—is about as late a date as possible if that committee report is to have the significance that it ought to have, or, indeed, that it was designed to have, in the consideration of constitutional matters before the Second Constitutional Conference of First Ministers which, as honourable senators know, will be held in late March, but no later than April 17, 1984.

Members, including the joint chairmen, co-chairmen, will also realize that from January 31 to that date is a relatively short period of time for the provincial governments and the federal government to consider all the implications and ramifications of what will be before the First Ministers' Conference, and indeed what is contained in the report.

Therefore, I want to support this recommendation, but I would caution, since some comments were made that perhaps the committee should take even more time, that there is a problem in that the report will not have the consideration it deserves prior to the meeting of the first ministers where, of course, constitutional considerations respecting federal government institutions like the Senate will be on the agenda. Although I support the recommendation, I would caution honourable senators against expressing the view that there is still more time. The report has to make the rounds of the people who have to look at it.

Hon. Martial Asselin: Let us do our job properly.

Senator Olson: We can do our job properly. I hope Senator Asselin is not trying to pick an argument with me. That conference is required to proceed, and, if we are to have an influence on the decisions or the discussions that will take place at that conference, then the report ought to be published in time for the background consideration that is always necessary.

I have no problem with the recommendations, but I do not think we should stretch them out because, if we do, the conference will go on in the absence of adequate consideration of a report that has occupied a great deal of the time and attention of a number of members.

Senator Asselin: Senator Olson should know that, when we met with the premiers of the provinces, they indicated to the committee that reform of the Senate was not one of their priorities, so they can wait for one year or more. How come he is in such a hurry?

Hon. Arthur Tremblay: We previously discussed the date on which the constitutional conference, provided in the amendment, could take place. We had an exchange of views on that. My understanding was that the proclamation of the amendment we have adopted cannot be made before June 1. Therefore, the amendment is not in force before June 1, 1984.

If I remember correctly, after one or two weeks of consultation with the Department of Justice, the chairman of the Standing Senate Committee on Legal and Constitutional

[Senator Olson.]

Affairs confirmed my understanding that the proclamation will not be issued before June 1, so there will not be a constitutional conference before that date.

I did not question if, for another reason, we could not accept a longer delay than proposed by Senator Roblin, but the reason for not having a longer delay is not the one given by the Leader of the Government.

Senator Olson: Honourable senators, my honourable friends can have their own opinion, but, as usual, they have completely missed the point.

Senator Roblin: Is the leader going to speak twice now?

Senator Olson: I believe, if I am asked some questions, that is usually permitted. If Senator Roblin wants to object, that is his business.

Some senators have completely missed the point. I said that we need the report in time so that all the governments and officials within those governments will have adequate time to consider the implications and ramifications of the committee's recommendations. That is just as valid now as it was when I made my comments a few months ago. It does not depend only on the date that the conference is held because, while it may not have to be held before June 1, it probably will be.

Senator Molgat: I thank all honourable senators who participated in the discussion. We will certainly proceed as quickly as we can. The problems that have arisen—such as prorogation today, which we could not forecast—have not been within our control. Today I am expressing a pious hope that, immediately upon our return, whenever that may be, we will reconstitute the committee. The committee will certainly be prepared to get to work the moment that is done.

● (1230)

Honourable senators, comments have been made regarding travel to Australia. I might point out that we are clearly entitled to travel within Canada according to our terms of reference. That we have done; we have travelled to every provincial and territorial capital. Perhaps Senator Marshall's suggestion might be resolved by holding a joint meeting of the Australian Senate and the Canadian Senate in Canberra. It is beyond the responsibility of our committee, however, to decide upon that.

I repeat, honourable senators, that, if the committee can be reconstituted instantly, it will get to work instantly.

Hon. Daniel Riley: Honourable senators, I should like to put a question to Senator Molgat. If this committee—dying as it will on prorogation—is reconstituted at the opening of the next session, will it be necessary to have the unanimous consent of both houses?

Senator Molgat: My understanding of the procedure is that a motion will be introduced. That will be a debatable motion, on which a vote will be taken at some stage.

Motion agreed to and report adopted.