

Hon. Gildas L. Molgat (Deputy Leader of the Opposition): Honourable senators, that is agreeable to us. I assume that when we come back at 2 p.m. we will be at the stage we were at prior to Royal Assent.

Senator Lynch-Staunton: Yes.

The Hon. the Speaker *pro tempore*: Before leaving the Chair, I would like to invite everyone to come into the Speaker's chambers to enjoy a cup of water, tainted with Christmas spirit.

The sitting of the Senate was suspended.

At 2 p.m. the sitting of the Senate was resumed, the Speaker *pro tempore* in the Chair.

BUSINESS OF THE SENATE

Hon. John Lynch-Staunton (Deputy Leader of the Government): Honourable senators, before we proceed, may I be allowed to make some comments. I think it is only fair that I give the background to our earlier refusal to grant Senator Frith an adjournment of the debate on C-18. As members of this House know, despite the best efforts of all involved, the Parliamentary process seems to include a last-minute rush to get priority legislation passed within a very short deadline, and this is what we are coping with now. Bill C-18 is one of a number of bills which the government urgently needs by the end of this year.

We had on many occasions asked the opposition for leave in order to accelerate the passage of key legislation, but this was refused more often than not. So when Senator Frith made his motion this morning, our reaction, certainly mine—and I do not want him to feel that this was anything more than a guess on my part, based on nothing but flimsy evidence, if any—was that this could be interpreted as a delaying tactic and that, on Monday, someone else may ask for the adjournment of the debate, and on Tuesday, and on Wednesday. Then we would be facing an impasse.

On this Bill C-18, particularly, I know the opposition has not been pleased with the way it was handled by the committee, and we know the minority members on the committee had made a statement in the report to that effect. Indeed, we had expected that there would be a debate and perhaps a vote on it. At what stage the vote would take place, of course, we did not know, but we were pretty sure that there would be a vote. As it turns out, when Senator Frith made his motion, our side felt that, if there had to be a decision by a vote, let us take the vote on his motion.

That is the simple reason why we chose that avenue to call the vote. It had nothing to do with limiting the debate or trying to stall the Leader of the Opposition's participation in it. It was simply that we felt a priority had to be given to getting this and other legislation through by a given time.

The government does have an agenda. It does like to cooperate with the opposition, but it cannot have its agenda set by the opposition. This does not mean restricting the opposition's right to scrutinize and debate but it does include an obligation

by this house to decide on legislation within a given time frame.

I would suggest, after this explanation, that we could revert to Senator Frith's motion to adjourn the debate. We would look at it more favorably if we could have some—perhaps undertaking would be too strong a word, but certainly some more-than-passing indication, and preferably a strong indication, that this legislation and other key bills will be disposed of without any undue delay. We just have to have these bills by a given date.

That, honourable senators, is, my proposal or suggestion, which I leave with my honourable friends opposite. Perhaps we could discuss it further after hearing their reaction.

Hon. Royce Frith (Leader of the Opposition): Honourable senators, I was hoping that we could leave the matter in the context of how serious I think it is for any senator to have a motion for adjournment denied at a time when there has been no delay, let alone undue delay. The bill had been here for minutes—not days, but minutes—when I proposed the motion and I gave a reason for my motion.

I was hoping that we could simply say that the whole thing was a mistake. I was hoping that what Senator Lynch-Staunton proposed would be in the context not of undue delay or government agenda or any of those things, but just that it was an unfortunate development and those things happen. Rather than get into a question that invokes some response concerning the rights of the government and the rights of the opposition, which puts me in a position of having to deal with the other matter, why not leave it simply as an unfortunate development that we could treat as such and allow the motion to stand.

I can say on that one issue, as soon as I have a copy of those proceedings, I am ready to proceed and I do not intend to adjourn the motion again. That was always my intention. But I would really like to show that without getting into a disagreeable exchange with Senator Lynch-Staunton. I understand what he said, but do not tempt us to debate that aspect of the government's agenda, the opposition's rights and so on. Let us leave it on the basis that it developed in an unfortunate way. It was an unfortunate development.

One always has the trouble in a case like this, of keeping one's ego out of it, and leaving it on the basis of what is best for the Senate. But I can say that my ego says that that would be the right thing to do, and if we do it, I will say that for the sake of the Senate, it is best that that is what happens. From there on, we simply forget that it ever happened. That would be my policy, if we can leave it in that simple form and just forget about the business of government agenda and our agenda. That is something that can be debated another time. Let us just adjourn it and get on to the next order of business.

Hon. Gildas L. Molgat (Deputy Leader of the Opposition): I do not want to add anything to what my leader has said, except to make it clear where we stand. We agree to go back to where we began this morning, when there was a motion by honourable Senator Frith for the adjournment of the debate. That would be accepted, as is. Anything else that happened