

BUSINESS OF THE SENATE

Senator Perrault: Honourable senators, may I make a brief statement?

As honourable senators know, it was planned that royal assent be given to the bill we have been discussing in Committee of the Whole this day and the bill to which we have accorded third reading. In the other place, as we have been informed, the quorum was lost a few minutes ago. As a result, there are no members of the other place to assist in the process of royal assent.

It is a rather unusual occurrence, as honourable senators are aware, but, in any case, it is not possible to have royal assent to what is regarded by the government as an important measure.

The delay in reassembling was occasioned by discussions with representatives of the other place about the time that royal assent might be scheduled. That, of course, must take place at some time next week. It is proposed, therefore, that the Senate meet on Monday evening. We have been informed that there will be legislation for introduction in the Senate at that time. Perhaps at some time during the course of Monday evening royal assent might proceed as it would have under normal circumstances.

Senator Flynn: Honourable senators, I do not criticize the government leader for what has happened, but I think he recognizes that this puts us in an ironic situation, after being forced to deal with this bill in the last two days at high speed because of the undertaking we gave that we would do everything possible to have royal assent today to enable the Prime Minister to call an election tomorrow or before Monday, if he wished.

I do not know whose fault it is in the other place. I think it is the fault of the whole of the House of Commons, and the government must certainly share a lot in the responsibility for the situation. I do not know why we should come back on Monday night instead of on Tuesday, which is our usual day of sitting. I appreciate that there may be some legislation coming, but the leader has not told us whether any has been passed this afternoon. I understand that Bill C-38 has not been passed. In any event, Bill C-38 is not of an urgent nature, because it is already in force. Even if it were left pending for a few days, it would really make no difference.

In order to get even with the House of Commons, I would suggest that we come back on Tuesday evening—

Senator Connolly (Ottawa West): Thursday.

Senator Flynn: Thursday, perhaps. I will accept an amendment by Senator Connolly.

● (1720)

If the Leader of the Government tells me that if we come back on Monday evening, and royal assent is given to this legislation, Parliament will be dissolved that evening or the

next day, I will agree with him. Without that assurance, I think it is unreasonable to ask us to come back on Monday evening.

Senator Perrault: Honourable senators, I want to add, on behalf of the government, that the co-operation of the official opposition during the past week, and especially during the last two days, has been very much appreciated. The opposition has conducted itself in the best parliamentary form and spirit, and we appreciate that very much.

I apologize for those members of the government in the other place who share some responsibility and blame for failing to maintain a quorum at an important time in the history of the Parliament of Canada. Of course, the blame must be shared by members of other parties also.

I can only reiterate what I said. We have been given assurances in the past hour that a bill will be ready for introduction in the Senate on Monday evening. I am asking the Senate to support the motion to adjourn until Monday evening.

Senator Marshall: I understand this is the first time this ever happened in Canadian history. It should be noted that it happened on the anniversary of the summons to the Senate of Senators Anderson, Bird, Guay, Haidasz, Lewis, Roblin and myself.

Senator Grosart: Honourable senators for the record, I suggest that attention be called to the fact that there is considerably more than a quorum in the Senate at this time, and has been all day. I think it should also be recorded that this has been a colossal piece of government bungling. There is no question about that. Not only was there nobody at the door of the House of Commons to answer the summons of the Black Rod, but the Deputy of the Governor General was kept waiting, so I feel it should not just pass as a joke or a funny happening; it is a colossal piece of bungling.

Senator Lamontagne: Do not get too partisan.

Senator Grosart: I am not being partisan. I am speaking of the privileges of this house, and respect for the Parliament of Canada. We were told that it was of utmost urgency that this particular bill be assented to. The minister was here for most of the day, and he insisted on the importance of this measure and said it was of absolute urgency that it be passed. For that reason, this chamber deliberately undertook not to give this bill the kind of consideration that it should have had. We, on this side, had many more amendments to move but, deliberately, we decided not to move all of them in order that royal assent might be given to this bill this afternoon.

I say it is bungling, it is a disgrace, and the entire responsibility rests with the government who, themselves, were impressing upon us the urgency associated with the passing of this bill. It was up to the government to ensure there was a quorum in the other place. It is not the responsibility of the opposition to make sure there is a quorum to meet the requirements of the government.

My leader, in his remarks this evening, has been unusually gentle. It is not very often that we on this side feel he