

Senator Perrault: I do not feel that every time house leaders in the other place have a meeting, the Senate should be a party to it.

Senator Asselin: On this question, yes.

Senator Perrault: And I am sure they do not feel they should be party to everything we discuss in our meetings here. May I propose, therefore, that we have a meeting between the time we rise today and when we meet tomorrow to discuss the matter of the Constitution Committee and its reporting date.

Senator Roblin: My honourable friend, in his usual elegant style, has dragged the red herring across the trail. He knows perfectly well that we are talking about a joint committee of the Senate and House of Commons, and that no one on this side is expecting to have any input or anything to do with ordinary matters in the other house. It is a joint committee, and he knows perfectly well that I am not recommending this course because I like it. I am yielding to force majeure. We have been told in the committee that we will not have the power to decide, that it will be decided outside our ranks. That is the reason why I take such an interest in the matter.

● (1425)

Senator Perrault: As usual, the honourable senator's remarks will be given careful consideration. But there has been no directive issued that the committee shall not be permitted to decide whether or not it wishes to report that an extension of the sitting time is warranted. I know of no such directive and I do not believe that any such directive has been issued anywhere.

Senator Roblin: Does my honourable friend know that the committee has voted against extending the time? I hope he knows that much.

Senator Perrault: Because a majority of the committee voted against a certain proposal does not necessarily mean to say that a decision was taken in some other place and that some kind of order was issued to those members that were required to vote in a certain fashion. Indeed, may I offer the personal speculation that the honourable senator may be pleasantly surprised in due time when he has the full facts concerning the possibility of extending the committee times.

Senator Asselin: If you know something, say so.

Senator Roblin: I will be glad to wait. If it is worth waiting for; I shall congratulate my honourable friend upon it. But I never said that someone had instructed the committee how to vote. That is not what I said, and my honourable friend knows it is not what I said. I said that we were told in the committee that the decision would be made by the house leaders, not by the members of the committee themselves. When the protest was made, the soothing answer that was given was "Never mind, we are going to refer it to the leaders of the house and they will decide whether or not there will be any extension of time." That is the fact. I regret to report it, but it is so.

[Senator Marshall.]

ITALY

EARTHQUAKE DISASTER—SAFETY OF CANADIANS IN AREA

Hon. Peter Bosa: Honourable senators, I have two questions for the Leader of the Government. First, is he in a position to tell us whether there were any Canadians present in the earthquake area of southern Italy; and, secondly, does he have any additional information that he would like to share with the Senate?

Hon. Raymond J. Perrault (Leader of the Government): Honourable senators, I have some further information with respect to the terrible disaster in Italy. So far as Canadians are concerned, our embassy in Rome, in its latest report—a copy of which I shall read in a moment—mentioned that the local authorities with whom they are in touch are at this stage concentrating on the rescue of victims rather than in establishing their identity. As a consequence of this, and of disrupted communications, our embassy has not yet been able to establish the safety and well-being of the relatively few Canadians believed to be in the severely damaged area. We do not have the names of those "relatively few Canadians," but those names will be provided to honourable senators as quickly as possible.

We have received a telex communication from Rome, a copy of which is before me. It is not a long telex, and perhaps it should be put on the record. It reads:

Severe earthquake measuring 6.5 on Richter scale struck Italian Province of Campania, in area south and east of Naples last night at about 1930 hours. Epicentre is Town of Eboli with extensive damage around City of Avellino. Early indications are of major disaster, placing dead in hundreds and injured in thousands. Some estimates place dead in thousands.

It is very difficult at this stage to give estimate or reports on safety of Canadians. Local authorities with whom we have been in touch are concentrating entirely on rescue of victims and not their identity.

Notices have been issued to avoid travel to Naples and beyond because of clogged facilities, damaged roads and interrupted communications.

Our preliminary contacts with MFA indicate they have set up co-ordinating group but for now are awaiting further information before making requests for assistance from either governments or private agencies.

Authorities are in any case fairly confident of disposing of sufficient emergency supplies for early stages, except perhaps for plasma and blood which are being requested through media.

● (1430)

There is, then, a course of action recommended to the government with respect to the conveying of messages of sympathy to the Italian government, and so on. The telex continues:

We are awaiting confirmation of the full extent of the tragedy, which will be known in greater detail over the next 24 hours.