

date, none of the interventions in committee, in this house or in the other place, justify in any way an arbitrary date such as December 9. So, can he tell the Senate what the government had in mind when it set a date like December 9, a date it will not change?

● (1415)

[English]

Senator Perrault: Well, honourable senators, it is not my intention to reopen a debate which was held in the Senate. It would, indeed, be contrary to our rules to reopen a debate on a motion which has already been decided by the Senate. But I know the honourable senator is earnestly seeking information and enlightenment, and all of us appreciate his lively concern in this matter. May I suggest that the power of his eloquence may well persuade members of the joint committee to accede ultimately to his request. The Prime Minister has stated a number of times that if evidence can be presented and justification is provided for an extension of the committee hearing dates, then certainly supporters of the government on the committee would consider such an extension. So I think it can be said, honourable senators, that the matter may not have been finally disposed of.

Hon. Duff Roblin (Deputy Leader of the Opposition): Honourable senators, could I ask a supplementary question on the same point? I recall well that when we were concerned about the question of time limits in this house we received the most fulsome assurances from the Leader of the Government that the committee would be able to make its own recommendations in the matter. Indeed, as my honourable friend has said, it has made its recommendation, which is negative.

But we were reassured again in the committee that we need not lose heart because the question would be referred to the leaders outside the committee for some adjudication. Now my question for the leader is: Has he, as a representative of the Senate, been asked to take part in those consultations?

Senator Perrault: Honourable senators, as I stated in reply to Senator Asselin, it is conceivable that the final disposition of this question has not been made. Let me assure honourable senators on that point. We have not completed the hearing process in the joint committee; there are many more witnesses to be heard, and it is entirely possible for the committee to report back on December 5, or before that date, certainly by December 9, conveying its recommendation that in the light of additional briefs and additional requests received from certain associations, organizations or individuals, that the committee recommends to the Senate and to the other place that a time extension, for example, be made.

● (1420)

Perhaps it is too early to make a final decision with respect to this proposal for extended hearings. With respect to Senate participation in the process of that final determination, there will be substantial Senate involvement.

Senator Roblin: I am delighted to hear that, because there has been no evidence of it so far. The evidence so far is that the consultations have been limited to members of the House

of Commons. This is a joint committee, and when I heard members of the Constitution Committee saying that "house leaders would be consulted," I must say that in my naiveté I thought that might possibly include leaders in the Senate; but, if that is not to be, then we should be told about it; if it is to be, then why have we not been brought in on the ground floor?

Senator Perrault: Honourable senators, the Senate has certainly not been excluded from this process of constitutional review in any sense. There are ten members of the Senate participating on a most active and useful basis in that committee's deliberations. In the second place, as Leader of the Government in the Senate, I participate in many of the discussions relating to that committee's activity and the position of the government with respect to that committee. Moreover, anyone who assumes that the Joint Chairman from the Senate, Senator Hays, is operating merely as a cypher who has no participation in the decision-making process is entirely incorrect in his assumptions.

Senator Roblin: My honourable friend is avoiding the question. I know perfectly well, and he knows perfectly well, that insofar as the members of that committee are concerned the whole subject has been removed from their domain and jurisdiction and has been handed over to the leaders of the house. But who are those leaders? Do they include members of the Senate? That is my point.

My honourable friend has told me quite frankly, and I commend him for his frankness, that he has not been consulted by the leaders in the other place with respect to the changing of the reporting time of this body. I would suggest that "leaders of the house" should include, with all modesty, if not myself, certainly my colleague, the Leader of the Opposition here, and his deputy when he is not here. But I can speak for myself and say that I have heard nothing of it.

I do not know why the Senate is excluded from this process in which the decisions are being made. They are not being made in the committee. The committee told us that. They are being made outside by our masters.

Senator Perrault: Honourable senators, I must say that I am surprised that the Honourable Senator Roblin seems to have developed a rejection complex merely because he has not been invited to a "confab" of political leaders in the other place. However, now that he has suggested that he thinks there is merit in house leaders discussing this matter, and has said so publicly and in his usual eloquent way, with the support of the Honourable Senator Asselin who spoke on it today, I will be more than delighted to meet with the Leader of the Opposition in the Senate to discuss this matter.

In this regard I do not think members in the other place will feel especially rejected if they are not invited to participate in the deliberations of house leaders. I am sure the distinguished Deputy Leader of the Government in the Senate would be pleased to be part of that meeting, as I am sure would be the Deputy Leader of the Opposition.

Senator Marshall: The distinguished Deputy Leader of the Opposition.