

absolutely not borne out by the facts as I know them—and, if I may say so, I am in a unique position to know them.

STATEMENTS OF PRIME MINISTER AND GOVERNMENT LEADER
IN THE SENATE—APPARENT CONTRADICTION

Hon. Raymond J. Perrault: Nobody is going to criticize the efforts of the Leader of the Government in the Senate to bring about an agreement.

Senator Frith: Speak for yourself!

Senator Perrault: No, he has invested months of time and energy to bring about a settlement. I am not criticizing the effort. I am criticizing some of the actions and the substance of that effort. I remember in this chamber a few months ago the Leader of the Government saying: "This is a seamless web." He spoke of the proposal as though it were woven out of some gossamer-thin fabric, that if we touched any aspect of it we would not have a deal. I remember the oratory of the Leader of the Government at that time.

The explanation the leader has given today would appear to contradict the statement of the Right Honourable the Prime Minister in the *Globe and Mail* interview, in which he said, "There was no way I was going to be forced to call a meeting." You are telling us today, Mr. Leader, that the circumstances were such that it was impossible to call the meeting. Do we take it, then, that you are contradicting the statement made by your leader, the Prime Minister, in which he said that there was no way he was going to call this meeting, obviously drawing on his long experience in labour negotiations?

I used to work with a Minister of Labour and I know the old negotiating tactic. You get as many people in the room as possible and you turn up the heat. You set up a big urn of black coffee in the corner and you hope that, in the morning, totally exhausted, they are going to stagger out of the place saying, "Tell us where to sign." However, those tactics do not work and are unacceptable when you are deciding the future of the nation. You do not do that to a country like Canada—

Senator Doody: What's the question?

Senator Perrault: —which is looking for its future, surely. The leader's explanation is at total variance with the statement given by the Prime Minister to *The Globe and Mail*, in which he said that there was no way he was going to call a meeting. He said, "The timing had to be just right, and then I decided to roll the dice."

Hon. Lowell Murray (Leader of the Government and Minister of State for Federal-Provincial Relations): Honourable senators, very briefly, let me say that the meeting could have been called at any time. It could have been called in February, but it would almost surely have failed had it been called at that time. As I said, when it finally was called, there were only two outstanding issues on the table. To my astonishment, it took a week to resolve those.

The honourable senator refers to my description of the Meech Lake Accord as a seamless web. Premier McKenna acknowledged that it was a seamless web, and so did others.

[Senator Murray.]

Premier McKenna in particular, when he saw the need for a companion resolution in order to address his concerns, saw that it would be quite impossible to reopen Meech Lake and bring amendments to it without forcing all provinces to retrace their steps and set new three-year time limits. He also saw all the other problems that would have been created. So he acknowledged by his action that Meech Lake was a seamless web.

Finally, let me just say this for the record: There has been some talk and reporting about the atmosphere of the first ministers' conference. The honourable senator talks about turning up the heat. Somebody else talked about intimidation, pressure, and coercion. I am the only person who was in the room other than the 11 first ministers, and I can tell the honourable senator that the discussions and the debates in that room featured none—none!—of the personal acrimony or animosity that has been described since in very imaginative terms by some journalists. The types of interventions made by first ministers were of the kind you heard from Premier McKenna, Premier Peterson and Prime Minister Mulroney in their speeches before the Newfoundland House of Assembly. They were very similar, in terms of the future of the country and what was at stake with the Meech Lake Accord. My observation, as one Canadian, is that the interventions at the first ministers' conference were such as to do credit to the country and to all those who participated. If you do not believe me, again, I ask you to refer to the declarations made since the first ministers' conference by people like Premier Peterson, who said that all this talk of intimidation and coercion and manipulation was so much nonsense. Neither he nor, certainly, nine of the other first ministers felt in any way that they were being pressured, coerced or intimidated.

• (1620)

INTERPRETATION OF AMENDING FORMULA—EFFECT OF TIME
LIMITS FOR PROCLAMATION—POSITION OF QUEBEC

Hon. Jack Austin: I wonder if I could return the leader to the question asked by Senator Frith with respect to the proposed three-year rolling clock for the amending procedure. My question is whether, in presenting evidence to the Supreme Court on the position of the provinces, the government would have been in a position to show the Supreme Court that the Province of Quebec would, indeed, re-enact the resolution, or whether the position was that nothing was known of the intentions of the Province of Quebec and would not have been known until the Supreme Court had uttered its opinion.

Hon. Lowell Murray (Leader of the Government and Minister of State for Federal-Provincial Relations): Honourable senators, the question is quite hypothetical at this point, but I think both my friend's question and that of Senator Frith might be looked at by our legal and constitutional advisers in the Department of Justice.

If there is a prepared reply, I will bring it in. I certainly undertake to bring in a copy of the draft question I read at my news conference the other day. That draft question had been prepared for me by the government's legal advisers.