

This is the reality of what occurred; not the theory but the reality of what occurred in the House of Commons' Legislative Committee, at least as far as this witness is concerned.

Moving on to report stage, when the House returned on September 8, 1992, the committee tabled its report and the charade began anew, in a new setting and a new light. On Monday, September 14, debate began on the report stage. After only two hours of debate, the Honourable Monique Vézina, Minister of State for Seniors and for Employment and Immigration, gave notice of motion of time allocation —

Senator Gigantès: Again?

Senator Frith: —for the remaining stages. There would be one more day of debate at report stage and one day at third reading. After two hours of debate, notice of time allocation was given. Two hours of debate was too much for this government.

On Tuesday, September 15, the time allocation motion was moved and voted upon without debate. The vote at report stage was forced at 4:45 that afternoon, after a further three-and-three-quarter hours of debate that day.

On Wednesday, September 16, there were three-and-a-quarter hours of debate at third reading. The vote was forced at 7 p.m. pursuant to the time allocation motion and the bill was passed.

So this was the parliamentary process in the other place on Bill C-80: Second reading, six-and-a-half hours of debate; committee rushed, demeaning the witnesses; report stage, seven-and-three-quarter hours of total debate; third reading, three-and-a-quarter hours. That is it; end of Act III; a very short play.

Parliament, for hundreds of years supposedly a place of debate, study, discussion and informed decision, ground under the government's heel again. Pitiful! Purely a routine, mechanical, levered stamp machine, and a damned nuisance to this government, at that. Will it be the same here?

The government claims that we must work to regain people's respect for Parliament. In its 1991 constitutional proposal, the government said—and I say to the Leader of the Government in the Senate that this was your government—

Canada's political institutions must be revitalized. One of the important conclusions of the Citizens' Forum on Canada's future was that Canadians are increasingly concerned about the effectiveness, fairness, and responsiveness of those institutions.

Our objective must be to build upon our parliamentary traditions to produce improved political institutions. These institutions must be democratic; they must be effective; they must be seen by Canadians across the country to represent them fairly . . .

Senator Stewart: That is all before Charlottetown.

Senator Frith: And do you hear those words, Barbara Blouin? You probably heard those words.

[Senator Frith.]

These institutions must be democratic; they must be effective; they must be seen by Canadians across the country to represent them fairly and responsively . . .

Barbara Blouin writes:

I haven't felt so powerless in all my life . . . and then to realize that it meant nothing, and even that I and others were being used to uphold the propaganda that this is a democratic process—it's hard to swallow.

Senator Molgat: Who is saying that?

Senator Frith: That is what the witness, Barbara Blouin, said. That is what she, the witness, said as to how she was treated.

So back again to the government's 1990 constitutional proposals:

These institutions must be democratic; they must be effective; they must be seen by Canadians across the country to represent them fairly and responsively; and they must reflect the diversity of peoples and opinions within the country.

Honourable senators, these big words should be followed by concrete actions. There is still a chance. These big words certainly were not followed by such actions in the other place, but that is what a Senate is for. That is why we have a bicameral system. So if we are to follow these big words by concrete actions, why not start today? Why not have some meaningful committee hearings? We would prefer postponing the hearings until after the referendum vote.

Senator Murray: Why?

Senator Frith: But if the government is determined to press ahead, still let us do it right. No more shams. Let us take time. Let us have comprehensive hearings.

Senator Lynch-Staunton: Hear, hear!

Senator Frith: I want it understood clearly on the record that when I said "No more shams," and "Let us have comprehensive hearings," Senator Lynch-Staunton said "Hear, hear!"

Senator Lynch-Staunton: The sooner, the better.

Senator Frith: And let us treat the witnesses, in the words of the government, "fairly and responsively". This means approaching the hearings with an open mind and being prepared to respond to the concerns of the witnesses and not just to a government timetable.

Honourable senators, I wish to conclude by reading into the record a letter I received from Marcelle Dolment, Réseau d'action et d'information pour les femmes.

[Translation]

Marcelle Dolment, Réseau d'action et d'information pour les femmes.

Dear Sir:

We would like to be heard before the Senate in the debate on Bill C-80 concerning the child tax benefit