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—
Chair

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez

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Wednesday, October 20, 2004

•(1530)

[Translation]

The Clerk of the Committee: Good afternoon. My name is Marie Louise Paradis. I am the clerk assigned to this committee for this Parliament. Welcome.

First on the agenda is the election of the chair pursuant to Standing Orders 106(1). I am ready to entertain motions.

Mr. Godbout.

Mr. Marc Godbout (Ottawa—Orléans, Lib.): I would like to nominate Pablo Rodriguez because he has all of the necessary qualifications to become an excellent chairman of the Official Languages Committee.

The Clerk: Mr. Godbout nominates Mr. Rodriguez as chairman of the committee. Are there any other nominations? Is everyone in agreement?

(Motion agreed to)

The Clerk: I therefore declare Mr. Rodriguez duly elected chair of the committee.

We will now proceed to the election of the first vice-chair, from the official opposition. I am ready to entertain motions.

Mr. Maurice Vellacott (Saskatoon—Wanuskewin, CPC): I would like to nominate my colleague Pierre Poilievre.

The Clerk: Mr. Vellacott nominates Mr. Pierre Poilievre as vice-chairman of the committee.

Mr. Odina Desrochers (Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière, BQ): Does the position of first vice-chairman go to the official opposition?

The Clerk: Yes, to the official opposition.

Mr. Odina Desrochers: Thank you very much.

The Clerk: Are there any other nominations? No. Does the committee wish to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Yes.

(Motion agreed to)

The Clerk: I therefore declare Mr. Poilievre duly elected the official opposition vice-chair.

We are now ready to move on to the election of the second opposition vice-chair. I am ready to entertain motions.

Mr. Odina Desrochers: I nominate Mr. Godin from the NDP.

The Clerk: Mr. Desrochers nominates Mr. Yvon Godin as opposition vice-chairman. Are there any other nominations? Does everyone agree?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

The Clerk: Mr. Godin is therefore elected vice-chair for the other opposition parties.

I would now invite the chairman to take the chair.

The Chair (Mr. Pablo Rodriguez (Honoré-Mercier, Lib.)): I would first like to thank you for having chaired the first part of our meeting. I would also like to thank the committee members for their support. And I would also like to congratulate Messrs. Poilievre and Godin on their election. I know we will work well together. I am happy to be here.

I would now like to move on to the adoption of certain routine motions as we have already done in other committees. Madam Clerk has given me a list of the motions to be adopted.

The first one is a motion to retain the services of one analyst from the Library of Parliament. The name that has been suggested is that of Mr. Marion Ménard.

(Motion agreed to)

•(1535)

The Chair: Mr. Ménard has been an analyst with the Information and Research Branch of the Library of Parliament since 2002. He has a master's degree in political science from the University of Ottawa. From 1998 to 2002, he was a senior program officer for the Official Languages Support Program Branch of the Department of Canadian Heritage. We will be distributing his cv which contains all of these details.

I would like to once again congratulate you, Mr. Godin.

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Thank you very much.

The Chair: The second motion deals with establishing a subcommittee on Agenda and Procedure, which is not mandatory. Some other committees decided not to have a subcommittee, in view of the smaller number of members around the table. Would someone like to move this motion or discuss whether or not we really need a subcommittee?

Mr. Odina Desrochers: Mr. Chairman, how many members sit on the Official Languages Committee?

The Chair: We have a total of 12 members.

Mr. Odina Desrochers: In the light of my experience on other committees, I would strongly recommend that we have a steering committee. It is always more complicated to try and get 12 people to agree.

The Chair: This group is sovereign.

Mr. Simard.

Hon. Raymond Simard (Saint Boniface, Lib.): In the past, the committee became its own steering committee and it worked quite well. I have been on this committee for two years now and I can tell you that it is very productive. Most of our reports were unanimous.

I would therefore move that the entire committee be responsible for managing our business here. It should be very straightforward. That is my motion.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Vellacott.

Mr. Maurice Vellacott: I would suggest that we fill in that blank with a member. In past years we haven't always felt the need to have the parliamentary secretary to the minister. In fact, it's got an independence from the minister. So the parliamentary secretary serving as the adjoint, if you will, of the minister.... Therefore, we would just simply have the chair, the two vice-chairs, and a member from the BQ to make up the committee on agenda.

The Chair: Monsieur D'Amours.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Mr. Chairman, we have a limited number of people on this committee. One way or another, we all know how it works. The subcommittee makes recommendations to the committee which then once again debates the situation or the recommendations.

I don't see why our committee couldn't simply operate without having a subcommittee vet everything. The subcommittee would, in any event, have to submit its recommendations to the main committee. After all, this is not a large group. It would be different if we were 30. Members of such a subcommittee would represent a large percentage of the people who are already seated around the table now.

• (1540)

The Chair: Are there any other comments?

Mr. Godin.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Thank you. I wasn't expecting this type of motion. Some people might have been aware of this but nobody told me.

There was never any problem organizing the work of this committee. I would even say that this was the best run committee in Parliament in recent years. That does not mean that the outcome was always perfect, but the committee operation was smooth. Things usually proceed very quickly after or even before a meeting where witnesses are to appear. When we say that we would like to meet with someone in Ottawa to examine a given issue, things proceed quite rapidly.

We already have a number of meetings scheduled. If we had a steering committee, that would mean twice the number of meetings.

The steering committee would meet and then we would have to have another meeting, whereas we could easily do all of that at the same time, during the two hours that are set aside for our committee meeting.

I think you should revisit your motion. I have sat on this committee for almost eight years and, in my experience, it is the most efficient. We hardly ever disagree on our agenda.

The Chair: Mr. Desrochers.

Mr. Odina Desrochers: I support the consensus around the table. I sat on the Standing Public Accounts Committee and I must tell you that they did not get along as well as does the Official Languages Committee.

Mr. Yvon Godin: We really believe in official languages at this committee.

The Chair: Thank you very much. My understanding is that there will not be a subcommittee on Agenda and Procedure.

(Motion agreed to [See Minutes of Proceedings])

The Chair: Third we have a motion to receive and publish evidence in the absence of a quorum. You have the motion before you. Would someone like to move a motion?

Mr. Godin.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Can the clerk tell us if this is the same motion as the one we had in past years?

The Clerk: Yes.

The Chair: Perhaps you could say a few words about that.

The Clerk: It's only in order to hear witnesses.

Mr. Yvon Godin: The wording is the same.

The Clerk: I can distribute the motions that were adopted during the previous session.

The Chair: I will read you the motion that was adopted during the previous session: that the Chair be authorized to hold meetings to receive and publish evidence when a quorum is not present, provided that at least four (4) members are present, including a member of the opposition.

I believe we would change the number from four to three because there are fewer members on this committee. So, it would be essentially the same wording, except for the number, because of the limited membership on this committee.

[English]

It was four for a committee of sixteen people, and now it's three for a committee of twelve people.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Nepean—Carleton, CPC): I think there should be two opposition members and two government members so as to properly reflect the situation in the House.

The Chair: I hope that we will always be able to operate with a consensus. Are you moving that we change the number, Mr. Poilievre?

Mr. Cullen.

[English]

Hon. Roy Cullen (Etobicoke North, Lib.): One of the difficulties is if you have witnesses coming and you don't have enough members. Sometimes it's a matter of just scratching around and finding whatever members you can who are in Ottawa and are available. If you have to keep witnesses waiting or send them home because you don't have this equal balance, I think it's quite an insult to the witnesses. Most of the committees work on the basis that you have a certain quorum, and it's the responsibility of every member of every party to get their members to the meeting. If they're not there, are you going to keep the witnesses waiting or send them home? I don't think it makes any sense.

[Translation]

The Chair: Mr. Godin.

Mr. Yvon Godin: I think that is why we stipulate four members rather than twelve. However, to reflect the composition in the House, we should perhaps say that we need two opposition members and one government member. That isn't what it says here. If we must eliminate some people to keep the ones who are present, you will have fewer. Let us say two or three people. With the present wording of the motion, we would almost have two government members and one opposition member.

The opposition is ready to include one more person to listen to the witnesses. It is important for the witness to feel there are people listening to him. The committee should not be so small as to no longer resemble a committee. We have a responsibility to come to the meeting to listen to the witnesses. There are no decisions made during these meetings; we simply listen to what the witnesses have to say. We need to have people in the room, out of respect for the witnesses.

• (1545)

The Chair: Mr. Vellacott.

[English]

Mr. Maurice Vellacott: The way the motion reads now, three members are present, including a member of the opposition, which could technically be the chair and just members of this side. I'm not sure you'd want it that way, would you?

Hon. Roy Cullen: Maybe I'm missing the point, but I thought there was some consensus to reduce the size of the quorum, given the smaller committee.

I've been around here for a while, and sometimes you have a whole slate of witnesses. It could be a Friday or Monday, but to keep witnesses waiting or send them home because you don't have this sort of balance here, I don't think makes much sense. I think it's our responsibility as members of Parliament to do our committee work and not have witnesses sitting around doing nothing for a few hours.

The Chair: To remind you, the quorum is seven for the committee.

Jean-Claude.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: According to what Mr. Godin said, it would be for the purpose of hearing the witnesses and not in order to make any decisions. We want to minimize the risks. The main

responsibility of all members of this committee is to attend the meetings. However, we know that it is not always possible to do so. Do we want to put a witness in a situation where he might have to wait for us to do what we have to do? In past years, there were 16 members on the committee and we needed four in order to hear witnesses. Now there are 12 of us. I understand the issue about party representation and I can see the dilemma. We have gone from 16 and 4 to 12 and 3. We are not going from 12 to 2. We are moving to 12 and 3 to ensure some balance so that, when a witness appears before the committee, we will be there to listen and to show some respect.

[English]

The Chair: Monsieur Poilievre, and then Monsieur Desrochers.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Perhaps we could simply make one small change and stipulate that we need at least one opposition member.

Mr. Guy Lauzon (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, CPC): We need two opposition members to properly reflect the current composition of the House, as Mr. Godin has said. There are more opposition members than there are government members in the House.

The Chair: Mr. Desrochers.

Mr. Odina Desrochers: Since there are more opposition members than there are members of the governing party, I think we should have two opposition members and two from the government side. Moreover, the chairman can replace someone who is absent. I think it is a matter of discipline and the operation of the committee. There were strategies in the past, but the context has changed. So we should have two representatives from the Liberal side and two opposition members.

The Chair: Mr. Vellacott.

[English]

Mr. Maurice Vellacott: The way this is set up right now, it could be a chairman, three members of the opposition, and none of the governing party. That's the way the motion reads. Are you amenable to that?

Hon. Roy Cullen: Maybe this committee operates differently, but I was a member of the finance committee for many years. We travelled across Canada for the pre-budget consultations. I remember being in Winnipeg, Manitoba, with a whole slate of witnesses scheduled for the entire day, and we didn't have a quorum. We scrambled around to find any living MP who could come to the meeting.

Hon. Raymond Simard: I went.

• (1550)

Hon. Roy Cullen: Oh, you were the one. That's right. You weren't on the committee, you just did it.

Maybe this committee operates differently, but if you're travelling and having witnesses, you don't want a whole slate of witnesses sitting around all day while you play around with quorum, I'll tell you that much.

Mr. Maurice Vellacott: I'm asking Roy, are you okay with there being the chairman and the members of the opposition, no members of the government side? It doesn't say there has to be any member from the government.

Hon. Roy Cullen: What I'm saying is that we just deal with the number for a quorum, so many members of the committee.

Mr. Maurice Vellacott: So you don't care if it doesn't require any member of the government side at all? That's how the motion reads right now.

[Translation]

The Chair: Mr. D'Amours.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: I would like to raise one final point, Mr. Chairman. We are naturally talking about three plus one, and the chair is from the government side, but in actual fact this is about the quorum required for hearing witnesses. This is not the quorum required for making decisions.

The composition, whether we are talking fourteen or two, has no relevance. No decisions are being made. We are doing this so that the witnesses appearing before this committee can be heard, regardless of who is present. This is about showing respect to witnesses. Whether we are three or four, or two sitting on one side and two on the other, what does that change? In the final analysis, that doesn't matter at all. This is about giving witnesses an opportunity to be heard.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Simard.

Hon. Raymond Simard: I am prepared to agree to two and two. I would imagine that, with twelve people, we should be able to manage to have two people from each side. Our committee does not travel very much. We have never travelled since I have been a member of this committee. I do not think that that will create a tremendous problem. I agree with my colleagues that we are talking about a practical issue: we need to ensure that witnesses are not dismissed for lack of a quorum. We need to ascertain whether or not there is a big difference between three and four. I would put the matter to a vote so that we can finally make a decision.

The Chair: All right. We will probably discuss the number.

Mr. Yvon Godin: I would like to raise one final point. I made a mistake earlier. It doesn't change anything and we know what the discussion is all about, but according to this motion, there will be three people from the government, including the chair, and one person from the opposition. I want you to assure me that you did in fact understand that I made a mistake earlier. I am not referring to two liberals and one member from the opposition. Obviously, there will be somebody from the opposition.

I would like to make a suggestion with respect to this matter: that four members of the committee be present, including at least an opposition member, to hear the witnesses.

The Chair: So you are suggesting that the number three be replaced by the number four, and you're also moving that there be at least one member from the opposition.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Yes.

[English]

Mr. Maurice Vellacott: But is there not a requirement to have a member from the government side too?

The Chair: The chair is.

Mr. Maurice Vellacott: The chair is, but are there not others?

The Chair: It could be someone from the government side or not. It's just to listen to witnesses.

Mr. Maurice Vellacott: I understand, but I think it would be embarrassing to have no members of the government side, other than the chair, at a meeting.

The Chair: I'd rather have somebody else on my side, but...

[Translation]

Is there a consensus with respect to two and two, as was stated earlier, namely four committee members, including at least two opposition members? Is that what you in fact would like? You agree on four committee members, including at least two opposition members.

Mr. Godin, would you agree to change your motion?

Mr. Yvon Godin: Yes.

The Chair: So you are moving four members from the committee, including two from the opposition.

[English]

Mr. Maurice Vellacott: It's two from the opposition, two from the government.

The Chair: Is that okay? Is everybody okay with this?

[Translation]

(Motion agreed to [see *Minutes of Proceedings*])

•(1555)

[English]

The Chair: Next is time limits for witnesses and for statements and questioning.

[Translation]

Would somebody move the motion with more specific numbers? We can take a look at what was done before.

Mr. Vellacott.

[English]

Mr. Maurice Vellacott: I had a suggestion to do as we've done in some other committees: in this scenario, with a minority Parliament, that we do the first round with seven minutes for the official opposition, seven for the BQ, seven for the NDP, seven for the Liberals. On the second round, we'd have five minutes to each of the official opposition, BQ, Liberals. The third round would be official opposition, Liberals, NDP, and I'm not sure if you're getting into a fourth round, but it would go in that manner.

Do you want a copy of this?

The Chair: *Est-ce qu'on peut en avoir?* Do you have copies?

Monsieur Simard.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Raymond Simard: Mr. Chairman, I suggest that we look at what was done in the past. I would repeat that it worked very well. I would like us to take a brief look at what we did in the past.

The Chair: I will read the motion: that witnesses be given ten (10) minutes to make their opening statement; and that during the questioning of witnesses, the time allocated be as follows: seven minutes for each questioner on the first round in the following order: the Conservative Party, the Liberal Party, the Bloc québécois, the Liberal Party, the New Democratic Party, the Liberal Party; five minutes for each questioner on the second round, alternating between government and opposition parties; five minutes for each questioner on the third round, in the order in which they are recognized and at the discretion of the Chair.

I am not sure if that is clear. Perhaps those of you who were here could explain it.

Mr. Godin.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Chairman, in this committee, we were always in agreement as to how to proceed. We would begin with the opposition, and then we would go to the Government, to the Bloc, to the Government and then we would go back to the NDP. This is how we proceeded and we did the same thing for the second round. Right now, we are completely excluded from the second round. Is this a new way of doing things?

Basically, our common objective is to question witnesses and say what we have to say.

The Chair: Are you officially moving that the formal way of proceeding be maintained?

Mr. Yvon Godin: I am moving that we maintain the procedure we used before. I can tell you that the system worked very well.

The Chair: Are there any comments?

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: Mister Chairman, would you please reread the motion?

The Chair: It reads as follows: that witnesses be given ten minutes to make their opening statement; and that during the questioning of witnesses, the time allocated be as follows: seven minutes for each questioner on the first round in the following order: the Conservative Party, the Liberal Party, the Bloc québécois, the Liberal Party, the New Democratic Party, the Liberal Party; five minutes for each questioner on the second round, alternating between government and opposition parties; five minutes for each questioner on the third round in the order in which they are recognized and at the discretion of the Chair.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: The composition of the House has changed. The same rules cannot apply. The situation is no longer the same.

Hon. Raymond Simard: Not necessarily. If the Committee worked very well the way it was organized, I do not see why we should not continue operating in the same way. Obviously, it would be up to you to decide. Mr. Godin is an opposition member and he feels that it worked very well.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: The Liberals had two spots on the first round.

Hon. Raymond Simard: No. After the witnesses' ten minutes presentation, during the first round, we gave seven minutes to the

Conservatives, seven minutes to the Liberals, seven minutes to the Bloc, seven minutes to the Liberals, seven minutes to the New Democrats and then seven minutes to the Liberals. Is that right? The same order was followed during the second round, but the questioner were given five minutes.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: On the first round, you have seven minutes twice, where you have 135 members, and we get seven minutes once despite the fact that we have 99 members.

The Chair: We are always alternating between the parties, when it is not you, it is a member from the Bloc québécois and then a member from the NDP.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: It is a formula for proceeding. I am a member of other committees and this is how we have chosen the time.

• (1600)

The Chair: Yes, this is a case by case basis. But Mr. Godin raised a good point, he is totally excluded.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: No.

The Chair: Is he not excluded from the third round?

Mr. Guy Lauzon: Yes, but on the third round, he cannot have as much time as the government and...

The Chair: I understand. Right now, we need to examine Mr. Godin's motion, which is to maintain the procedural rules of the previous committee.

Mr. Vellacott.

[*English*]

Mr. Maurice Vellacott: I'm not clear. Is Mr. Godin's motion what I had proposed?

The Chair: No, his motion is to go as we did last time, to use the same rules.

Mr. Maurice Vellacott: Oh, I didn't understand him to say that at all. Actually, he just told me that he agreed with the proposal I put forward.

Mr. Yvon Godin: No, I didn't say that.

Mr. Maurice Vellacott: No? So what—

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvon Godin: No. What I said was that, according to your motion, I have been eliminated in the second round. The last time, we had 14 members, and not 19. And yet, on the second round, every party was given the floor. Today, I am excluded from the second round.

[*English*]

Mr. Maurice Vellacott: Okay, that's fair. Let's take the NDP, then, in the second round too. That would be fair.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Mr. D'Amours.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: Mr. Chairman, Mr. Godin has moved that we maintain the procedural rules followed by the committee during the last Parliament.

The Chair: Are you saying that you would like a vote?

[*English*]

Mr. Maurice Vellacott: I had the first motion on the floor here.

[Translation]

Mr. Guy André (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Mister Chairman, we are going to have to vote.

The Chair: We are either going to have to vote or find a consensus around the table.

Mr. André.

Mr. Guy André: We agree with the motion, providing the Bloc québécois has the floor after the Conservative Party.

The Chair: Which one of the two motions?

Mr. Guy André: The motion that states that the order would be as follows: the Conservative Party, the Bloc québécois... The Bloc québécois would be second.

[English]

The Chair: Just a second, Mr. Vellacott. I just want to make sure I know which document he's now talking about.

[Translation]

Mr. Odina Desrochers: My colleague from the Conservative Party has handed out a sheet. Before it is distributed, I would like to know if he has made a motion to that effect or if this was only to...

The Chair: I did not see that as a motion. I thought that this was for information purposes. I did not think that this was a formal motion.

Mr. Odina Desrochers: If you want to reach a consensus, there is one with respect to the information document that was distributed. I am wondering whether this is for information purposes or a bona fide motion.

The Chair: I saw it as an information document. Later, Mr. Godin made a proper motion. This is how I saw it. I thought that we were to discuss Mr. Godin's motion, as amended, before dealing with Mr. Vellacott's motion.

•(1603) _____ (Pause) _____

•(1606)

The Chair: Mr. Simard.

Hon. Raymond Simard: I would like to make a comment.

Some would prefer to leave things as they were in the past. However, there seems to be some confusion and I wanted us to have an opportunity to vote on the matter. Other committees have adopted this method according to the people in our party. For instance, on the first round, seven minutes would be given to the Conservative Party, to the Bloc québécois, to the NDP and to the Liberals. On the second round, we would go back to the Conservatives, then go to the Liberals, then the Bloc québécois and then come back to the Liberals, to the NDP and to the Liberals. Otherwise, we will only have five minutes during the first 35 minutes, that does not make any sense. My motion is what appears to have been adopted by other committees. I think that this is a very good idea.

[English]

The Chair: It's actually a mix of both propositions.

Hon. Raymond Simard: Do you want me to repeat that?

An hon. member: Sure, please.

Hon. Raymond Simard: Okay.

[Translation]

All of the opposition parties can intervene during the first round and each would have seven minutes. First we would heard from the Conservatives, then the Bloc québécois and the New Democratic Party. Then we have a round. At that point everybody would have already spoken once. Then we go back to the Conservatives, since the Liberals were the last ones to have intervened, and then it goes to the Liberals, to the Bloc, to the Liberals, to the NDP and to the Liberals. We can see that each party is given roughly the same amount of time during the two rounds.

[English]

Does that make sense?

[Translation]

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Vellacott.

[English]

Mr. Maurice Vellacott: Well, I guess with that, Raymond, then you actually have, by the end of the second round, 21 minutes. It's disproportionate to the numbers on the committee here. You have what, five members on the committee in total? The Conservatives have four, the Bloc have two, and the NDP have one.

Hon. Raymond Simard: Yes, but we have actually 22 minutes, because we have one round of seven minutes and three rounds of five minutes. Correct?

Mr. Maurice Vellacott: Okay.

Hon. Raymond Simard: So we have 22 minutes, and you would have in fact 21 minutes in the first round, plus 15 minutes.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: Not 21 in the first round.

Mr. Maurice Vellacott: No, we have seven per party.

Hon. Raymond Simard: Seven, seven, seven in the first round. So you would have actually 36 minutes.

Mr. Maurice Vellacott: No, I'm going on a party basis. On a party basis we have seven, and then we get five, for 12 total. By the end of the second round the Liberals would have 22 minutes in total, right? I think that's disproportionate.

Hon. Raymond Simard: That's what has been adopted in the other committees.

An hon. member: No, not on the committee I sat on.

[Translation]

The Chair: Mr. D'Amours.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: Mr. Chairman, if I may, I would like to mention to the Conservative Party members that their colleague, Paul Forseth, made an identical proposal to the Committee of Human Resources, Skills Development, Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities. The way it works is as follows: seven minutes for everyone in the first round and, in the second round, five minutes for the Conservatives, the Liberals, the Bloc Québécois, the Liberals, the NDP, and then the Liberals. The Bloc and the NDP agreed with that approach. It was one of your members that proposed it to the Human Resources Development committee last week, on Thursday to be exact. So it is not a new idea.

• (1610)

The Chair: Mr. Desrochers.

Mr. Odina Desrochers: Mr. Godin made a proposal and, as far as as I know, we have not yet made a decision on that. And now we are having other, unofficial proposals being presented.

Mr. Chairman, I would like Mr. Godin to tell us how he wants to proceed with his proposal. Then, if he decides to withdraw it, we could consider a second proposal. Otherwise, at the pace we are going, we will not finish by 5 o'clock.

The Chair: Mr. Godin, you have the floor.

Mr. Yvon Godin: I am prepared to move a friendly amendment. Let us use the Conservatives' document as is for the first round. At the end of the second round, we add the NDP, and in the third round, between the Conservatives and the Liberals, we add the Bloc Québécois. Then, in the fourth round, which we will never get to, we put the Conservatives and the Liberals. That is what I propose.

The Chair: Could you repeat that, please?

Mr. Yvon Godin: Very well, but let us look at the document that was presented by the Conservatives. While we are waiting for everyone to receive a copy, I would like to remind people that this is the official languages committee and a document of this kind should be presented in both languages.

The Chair: Your point is well taken.

[English]

We'll have a recess for five minutes so we can discuss this.

• (1613)

(Pause)

• (1617)

[Translation]

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Chairman, let us resume our work. We have reached a consensus and we are going to propose it. For the first round, we would follow the order indicated in the document that the Conservatives distributed to us. So we would start with the Conservatives, followed by the Bloc, the NDP and the Liberals. Then, in the second round, we would have the Conservatives, the Liberals, the Bloc and the NDP. In the third round, it would be the Conservatives, the Bloc, the Liberals and the NDP. The fourth round would consist of the Conservatives and Liberals.

I do not know whether you are open to the idea of adding the two other parties. We may never get that far, however, the committee is sometimes short of members to be able to continue; the chair could use this system when he wants to carry on. After that, nothing is

provided for, and this will not be a problem. In the fourth round, we could have the Conservatives, the Liberals, the Bloc and, to finish off, the NDP.

The Chair: I will repeat how this will work to be sure that everything is clear.

For the first round, seven minutes goes first to the Conservative Party, then to the Bloc Québécois, the NDP and the Liberal Party. The second round consists of five minutes for the Conservative Party, followed by the Liberal Party, the Bloc Québécois and the NDP. The third round is another five minutes for the Conservatives, the Bloc Québécois, the Liberal Party and the NDP. For the fourth round, if time permits, another five minutes will be given first to the Conservatives, then the Liberals, the Bloc and the NDP.

[English]

We'll never get there.

[Translation]

In any case, in theory, there is never a fourth round. However, if there were to be one, it would be provided for. Mr. Godin, I am not up to speed on all the rules and procedures of the House. I hope that you will allow me to learn them and adapt to them as time goes on.

I suppose that this is your proposal. Is that right?

Mr. Yvon Godin: We need someone to second the motion.

The Chair: Seconded by Mr. Desrochers. So there is a consensus on our *modus operandi*. Excellent.

(Motion agreed to)

• (1620)

The Chair: Let's now move on to payment of witnesses' travel and living expenses. Can someone move that, if requested, reasonable travel, accommodation and living expenses be reimbursed to witnesses not exceeding two representatives per organization, and that reimbursement for more representatives be, under exceptional circumstances, at the Chair's discretion?

Mr. Guy Lauzon: I so move.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Regarding distribution of documents with translation, can somebody move that the clerk be authorized to distribute only documents available in both official languages?

Mr. Godbout so moves.

Mr. Guy André: We would like to propose an amendment on this point.

Of course, we agree the documents must be in both official languages. However we would like to add the following: that the clerk be authorized to distribute only documents available in both official languages, and that no document from a witness be distributed without the authorization of the clerk.

The Chair: Could you explain to me the rationale behind this amendment?

Mr. Odina Desrochers: Mr. Chairman, I would like to answer your question.

In other committees, it has happened on occasion that documents were only written in one language and a member would state that they weren't being formally distributed. He would then add that they could be found in a pile on the table and would invite participants to peruse them. It was a violation of the act. By adding that no document from a witness be distributed without the authorization of the clerk, we're strengthening the motion on the distribution of documents.

[English]

The Chair: I see there's a friendly amendment.

[Translation]

I don't think that that's a problem.

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, Lib.): Can we make this amendment retroactive to 4 o'clock? By so doing, the other document would not be valid.

The Chair: Let's say we will apply it in the future.

(Motion, as amended, agreed to)

[English]

The Chair: The next is that the clerk of the committee, in consultation with the chair, be authorized to make the necessary arrangements to provide for working meals for the committee.

[Translation]

Mr. Godin so moves.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Now, with respect to in camera meetings transcripts, can someone move that one copy of the transcript of all in camera meetings be kept in the committee clerk's office for consultation by members of the committee? Mr. Vellacott so moves.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: On the notice of substantive motions, will someone move that, except for amendments to bills, 48 hours' notice be given before any substantive motion is considered by the committee, that the motion be filed with the clerk of the committee and distributed to committee members in both official languages, and that a notice given on Friday be deemed as having been given on the following Monday; that upon receipt of the notice, the clerk put the motion on the agenda of the committee's next meeting? Mr. Desrochers, seconded by Mr. Godbout, so moves.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: With respect to staff attending in camera meetings, will someone move that, unless otherwise ordered, each committee member be allowed to have one staff person present at in camera meetings? Mr. D'Amours, seconded by Ms. Boivin, so moves.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: With respect to the purchasing of documents, will someone move that the committee be authorized to purchase documents for the use of the committee? Mr. Godin, seconded by Mr. Lauzon, so moves.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: We have covered all the points we wanted to deal with in this first meeting. I thank you very much both for your work and your patience.

Mr. D'Amours.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: Mr. Chairman, would you be able to give us the schedules for the committees?

The Chair: This schedule varies according to the different groups, and our committee is under group 2. Therefore, meetings will take place on Tuesdays and Thursdays, between 9 and 11 a.m.

• (1625)

Mr. Marc Godbout: Could the clerk e-mail us the schedule?

The Chair: Of course.

Are we planning a meeting for this week?

If we held our next meeting next Tuesday, I could familiarize myself a little... Next Tuesday then, from 9 to 11 a.m. You will receive a notice to this effect.

Mr. Simard.

Hon. Raymond Simard: Ordinarily, Mr. Chairman, committee members are asked to suggest topics to be discussed which they would send to the chair; that will allow us to have a work plan ahead of time. I think it might be a good idea to do this over the coming days.

The Chair: It's a good suggestion. Moreover, a briefing book regarding committee business will be sent to your offices today or tomorrow.

Mr. Godin.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Perhaps the committee should address several issues, including National Defence, which does not look too promising. Among our future business, it may be a good idea to consider asking National Defence to appear before us. It would seem that there is a loss of control over that.

The Chair: It's noted.

Ms. Boivin.

Ms. Françoise Boivin: I arrived late, and I apologize. Do we intend to ask the commissioner of official languages to appear before us given that she just tabled a report? As a member of this committee, I have been reading it recently. I received her report and I've been following the news a bit. It would seem to me that it might be the first thing we should look at.

The Chair: That's an excellent point.

I would suggest that next Tuesday we discuss our priorities from the coming weeks. Each member could canvass his ideas. Some members have already made suggestions, which I would ask them to bring up once again next Tuesday. If it suits you, at that point we will set up a series of meetings, and one with the commissioner for official languages, of course.

Mr. Godin.

Mr. Yvon Godin: I agree with Ms. Boivin's suggestion. Before we start discussing these issues, we should first meet with the commissioner of official languages. She will give direction to our committee and we will then be able to decide upon an agenda.

The Chair: So, are you suggesting that we meet with her on Tuesday, if possible? Can we make that request?

Mrs. Carmen DePape (Committee Clerk): We can try.

The Chair: It at all possible, we will meet with the commissioner of official languages on Tuesday. If not, we will start with our agenda.

Thank you very much and see you Tuesday.

The meeting is adjourned.

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