



House of Commons
CANADA

Standing Committee on Human Resources, Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities

HUMA • NUMBER 001 • 2nd SESSION • 39th PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Wednesday, November 14, 2007

—
Chair

Mr. Dean Allison

Also available on the Parliament of Canada Web Site at the following address:

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Wednesday, November 14, 2007

• (1530)

[*Translation*]

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Jacques Mazziade): Welcome everyone.

[*English*]

I see quorum. We can now proceed to the election of the chair. I'm ready to receive motions to that effect.

Mr. Lake.

Mr. Mike Lake (Edmonton—Mill Woods—Beaumont, CPC): I nominate Dean Allison.

The Clerk: Mr. Lake moves to nominate Mr. Allison. Are there any other motions?

An hon. member: I move that nominations be closed.

The Clerk: Is it the pleasure of the committee to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Under certain conditions.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Clerk: I declare the motion carried and Mr. Allison duly elected chair of the committee.

Before inviting Mr. Allison to take the chair, we will now, if the committee wishes, proceed to the election of the vice-chairs.

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): I nominate Michael Savage.

The Clerk: Are there any further motions?

Is it the pleasure of the committee to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Clerk: I declare the motion carried and Mr. Savage duly elected first vice-chair of the committee.

Now let's proceed to the second vice-chair.

[*Translation*]

I am now prepared to receive motions for the position of second vice-chair.

Ms. France Bonsant (Compton—Stanstead, BQ): I nominate Mr. Lessard.

The Clerk: Ms. Bonsant has nominated Mr. Lessard. Are there any other motions?

Is it the pleasure of the committee to adopt the motion?

(Motion agreed to)

The Clerk: I declare the motion carried and Mr. Lessard duly elected second vice-chairman of the committee.

[*English*]

The Clerk: I now invite Mr. Allison to take the chair.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Judy Sgro: If only all our elections could be this brief.

The Chair (Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West—Glanbrook, CPC)): Yes, that's right.

The clerk has some routine motions that are now going to be distributed. We can probably take care of them today.

We'll hand those out and then we'll go through the routine motions.

Ms. Ruby Dhalla (Brampton—Springdale, Lib.): I have a question regarding "Minister of Foreign Affairs".

The Chair: I'm sorry?

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: It's under "Sub-Committee on Agenda...".

The Chair: Where is it?

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: It's in routine motions.

The Chair: I'm sorry, these are sample motions. This is what was taken from the foreign affairs committee; it's just a sample of routine motions. We have to adopt our own for the human resources committee.

• (1535)

Mr. Michael Savage: Mr. Chair, these are significantly different from the rules we've operated under previously. Is that correct?

The Chair: No. These are routine motions that are given out. There are a few additional ones that we have adopted, such as paying for child care expenses and things like that, but they're all pretty much the same across the board.

The subcommittee is typically made up of the two vice-chairs and the chair, so that's—

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: There's an addition. Isn't that right?

Mr. Michael Savage: This is not that.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich (Blackstrap, CPC): We'd like to have two on that one.

The Chair: We're going to bring these forward now and discuss them. These are just samples from other committees of what's gone on.

Judy.

Hon. Judy Sgro: I'd like to have a list of previous motions showing how the committee proceeded before and how you're suggesting that—

The Chair: Those were sent out in a pack, I believe, last week sometime.

Hon. Judy Sgro: I haven't seen any.

The Chair: No? You didn't get them? Okay.

Hon. Judy Sgro: Could we deal with this at our next meeting, when we've had time to do that comparison?

The Chair: Sure. They were distributed last week, so if you don't have them we have extra copies of what was adopted last time we were here.

Go ahead, Michael.

Mr. Michael Savage: These are quite different from what we adopted previously, from the rules under which this committee has operated since I've been on it and I think since before that. Because of the substantive change in what is being proposed, I wonder if we could—

The Chair: We're going to go through each one individually. All I asked the clerk to include was a set of routine motions from another committee. You have the one before us. We're going to go through each one individually. We will not be adopting the whole set. We'll be adopting each one in its due course. We'll go through each particular one.

We'll go to Judy.

Hon. Judy Sgro: Just further to that, Mr. Chair, I'm getting this information at this point when we haven't had a chance to review it in advance. Would it not be helpful, in terms of time efficiency, to review these things individually so we know whether we have any issues with them, and then deal with them at our next meeting?

The Chair: Well, no, I would suggest, since the only order of business today is to set the routine motions, that we go through them. That's the only order of business for today other than electing the chairs. If you look at the way it's worked before for our subcommittee on agenda and procedure, it has comprised the chair, two vice-chairs, and one member of the NDP.

The reason I asked for the handout was because I sat in on a foreign affairs committee. The only additional thing was that they asked for the parliamentary secretary to be included. If we're happy with the way it's operated here before, then my suggestion is that we just go with the subcommittee the way it was handled before, unless there's any other discussion on that notion. All I have here is for comparative purposes. It's not to be confusing, but just to look at what other committees have been doing.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: Just in case we want to upgrade our...

The Chair: Well, it's just a...

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: Well, there are a few little tweaks that could be improved. Right now we've just passed the first committee on agenda and procedure.

The Chair: Mr. Lessard.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Mr. Chairman, I did receive the routine motions. I took the trouble to review them one by one. There were only two that raised questions for me. However, the document that we were given this afternoon is not the same. I'm wondering why we were sent a document which is not the one on which we have to vote. I'm having the same problem as my colleagues on my right.

● (1540)

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Lessard, the document that was sent out last week was the list of routine motions from 39-1, which we operated under before. This list of routine motions was from when I sat in on a committee for foreign affairs. They were standard motions I just asked to have included so we could consider the ones we already have versus ones that are going on in other committees.

So the second list that was handed out was the list of routine motions that we operated under during the first Parliament, or during the last time we were here.

Go ahead, Mr. Lessard.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Lessard: Mr. Chairman, wouldn't it be more appropriate to repeat the routine motions that have already been adopted, since they are the ones that were sent to us? If anyone here thinks that they should be amended, let them table those amendments, and we will study their merits.

I don't think we should take the time right now, as a group, to examine what goes on at the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development in order to draw comparisons. We had examined that earlier. I imagine that if you're proposing this today, it's because you think we could improve some of our procedures. I have no problem with that, but instead of working with two documents, perhaps you could deal with this point by point and tell us where you want to make an amendment.

I don't feel comfortable going from one to the other. I would start with this one. That's my suggestion. Otherwise, Mr. Chairman, I would suggest that we resume this debate next time.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

No, Mr. Lessard, we're going to go through each one individually. The one we're going from is the one from the last time; so these are the motions we've had before. The only reason we have before us those other lists of routines of what other committees are doing is for comparison.

The first proposal I'm going to put before you is that the subcommittee on agenda and procedure be comprised of the chair, two vice-chairs, and one member from the New Democratic Party.

Is there any discussion on that?

Mr. Lake.

Mr. Mike Lake: I just want to clarify procedure here.

In terms of moving the motion, when you read it, are we going on the basis of the way it was last year, or does somebody have to move...?

The Chair: I'm going to propose the way it was the last time. If anyone wants to make changes, then this will be the time to talk about it.

Mr. Mike Lake: Okay.

The Chair: Sorry, but I've just been informed that I can't move it. We will need to have a mover for each one.

Ruby, do you want to move that?

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: Yes, I move that the subcommittee on agenda and procedure be composed of the chair, the two vice-chairs, and a member of the New Democratic Party.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.

That is exactly the way it was the last time.

Is there any discussion around that?

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll move to the next one, that the committee retain the services of one or more analysts from the Library of Parliament.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Lessard: I don't know what we've just adopted.

Ms. France Bonsant: The time it takes to be translated...

[*English*]

The Chair: I'll slow down.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Lessard: That's because, in order, you started with the new document that you gave us today. I was working from the document you had sent us previously. What is new in this one?

[*English*]

The Chair: We're working on the document that was sent out earlier. We are creating the new documents.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Lessard: I will work with that one: that's the one I examined.

I see, Mr. Chairman.

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): We're not using that one. We're rejecting it.

Ms. France Bonsant: I think that's the old one. We received this one this morning. We've just received it.

Mr. Yves Lessard: Yes, indeed.

• (1545)

Ms. France Bonsant: It's brand new. It looks like it's an example.

[*English*]

The Chair: The second routine motion we would like to look at now revolves around our research officers. I would like someone to propose the motion I have on the sheet, that the committee retain the services of one or more analysts from the Library of Parliament, as needed, to assist the committee in its work, at the discretion of the chair.

Judy, do you want to propose that?

Hon. Judy Sgro: I so move.

The Chair: Is there any discussion around that motion?

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: That is passed. Thank you very much.

The next motion you have revolves around quorum for receiving evidence. I believe the one we had worked well. It says that the chair be authorized to hold meetings to receive and publish evidence when a quorum is not present, providing that one member of the opposition is present.

Once again, the routine motion we had in foreign affairs was at three, but we also wanted to make sure we could hold more, so we had to amend it. I think what we have before us right now makes sense for being able to receive evidence.

Would someone like to propose that motion?

Ruby.

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: I so move.

The Chair: Is there any more discussion around that in terms of quorum for receiving evidence?

Mr. Lessard.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Lessard: Mr. Chairman, could you describe the situations that would require such a measure?

[*English*]

The Chair: I would say specifically when we were off the precinct. That's never happened here. What has happened was when we or other committees have been travelling and there was substitution and we've travelled with half the committee—so there are maybe only two to three or four people to begin with—people were late and we've had to actually sit and wait until we had quorum. I know that actually happened to us in Montreal because a couple of members were not present in time.

That would only be to receive evidence. This is not with regard to making decisions on behalf of the committee. This is with regard to receiving evidence and being able to hear witnesses and respect their time.

Mr. Mike Lake: Can you read the motion again?

The Chair: Yes, the motion is that the chair be authorized to hold meetings to receive and publish evidence when a quorum is not present, provided that at least one member of the opposition is present.

That goes in line with what we had last time. Is there any discussion?

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: The next one I have here, which is something I believe we've talked about before, is time for opening remarks and questioning of witnesses. You have there on the left of one page the way it was dealt with before. What has been dealt with in other committees is that witnesses be given 10 minutes for an opening statement, which is the way it has worked, and then that the first questioner be allowed seven minutes. The suggestion here is that the additional rounds be five minutes split between the government and opposition. That is what happens at some of the committees. That is not the way we have done it in the past. That is a suggestion.

Can I have any comments on that?

Ruby.

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: Sorry, I know we've already dealt with one of the previous motions, but if we can just go back to it for...

The Chair: Which one? Receiving evidence?

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: In regard to the chair being authorized to hold meetings.

The Chair: Okay.

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: I have a question. What happens if the chair doesn't show up and all of the other members are here?

• (1550)

The Chair: I would assume the vice-chair would be there.

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: Should we add that in?

The Chair: If you would like to add the chair or the vice-chair, sure, most definitely.

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: Thank you.

The Chair: We're going to amend that. Is that okay with...?

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: It was mainly for travel, was it not?

The Chair: It was mainly for travel, but let's just go back then. The amendment is that the chair or vice-chair be authorized.... Are we okay with that?

(Amendment agreed to [See *Minutes of Proceedings*])

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: Thank you.

The Chair: I know this was an issue, the question of witnesses. Are there any comments right now?

Yes, Mr. Martin.

Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP): I didn't quite understand what you had suggested and I didn't see it as an issue. I thought it worked quite well.

The Chair: You wouldn't, because you got to respond three times before the government even got to respond twice. Why would you think it was an issue? It worked very well for you guys. It wasn't fair, though.

Mr. Tony Martin: No, I thought it was fair.

The Chair: Of course you would. It was fair for you. It wasn't fair for anybody else.

Mr. Tony Martin: Everybody else thought it was fair and that it was an okay thing.

The Chair: No, I don't believe that was the case. That's why we're discussing it right now.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: We did that in the last session just to...

The Chair: Just a second, I'm going to have you on the list.

I have Mr. Lessard, followed by Ms. Yelich and Mr. Lake, and then back to Mr. Martin.

Go ahead, Mr. Lessard.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Lessard: What's there is exactly what we did the last time.

[*English*]

The Chair: That is correct.

The Chair: What I proposed was only what was done in other committees. Nothing is on the table right now; we're only discussing what the order should be. What you do have is exactly the way it was. What I suggested is what foreign affairs does, and now we're having some discussion on it.

Mr. Lessard.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Lessard: You're right, this is different from the other committees. The other committees are currently discussing this because they find that our way is the right way.

[*English*]

The Chair: There were some concerns about it. That's why I'm having some discussion right now.

I have Ms. Yelich and then Mr. Lake.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: I think it should reflect how the House questioning is allocated. Also, I attended many committees after that and I found that this seemed so much fairer for the government and the official opposition.

The Chair: Okay, thank you.

Mr. Lake, did you want to propose something?

Mr. Mike Lake: I can actually move something now, right?

The Chair: Yes, you can.

Mr. Mike Lake: Okay. If you want to refer to the motion we had the last time around, I'll read from that—with the change:

That in hearing evidence, the witnesses be allowed a maximum of ten (10) minutes for their presentation and that the rounds of questioning be as follows:

First Round (time includes Question & Answer) A. Liberal Party - 7 minutes B. Bloc Quebecois - 7 minutes C. New Democratic Party - 7 minutes D. Conservative Party- 7 minutes.

Second Round (time includes Question & Answer) A. Liberal Party - 5 minutes B. Bloc Quebecois - 5 minutes C. New Democratic Party - 5 minutes D. Conservative Party - 5 minutes.

Third Round (time includes Question & Answer) Back and forth between the opposition and the government, at the discretion of the Chair - 5 minutes.

The Chair: If you could repeat it, we're with you on the first round. Perhaps we could get you to repeat the second round, please, so we have it.

Mr. Mike Lake: Okay. It would be:

A. Liberal Party - 5 minutes B. Bloc Quebecois - 5 minutes C. New Democratic Party - 5 minutes D. Conservative Party- 5 minutes.

So it alternates: Liberal, Conservative, Bloc, Conservative, NDP, Conservative, for five minutes.

The Chair: We're going to take names here.

Mr. Martin, I still have you, then Mr. Lessard, and we'll come back.

Go ahead, Mr. Martin.

Mr. Tony Martin: I don't understand the need for change here. I thought we had a committee, probably one of the better working committees in the House in the last session. We all had a chance to ask our questions.

The Chair: I thought there was more than only one.

Mr. Tony Martin: When you look at parties, we each had a fair shot at the witnesses, and I think it worked well. I think we should leave it as it is. Why fix something that isn't broken?

The Chair: The challenge, once again, Mr. Martin, is that you had a chance to ask three questions when the Conservatives, who clearly would have four or five people show up, wouldn't get a chance to ask some questions. I ask if that's fair, if you hold one seat and they have four seats and all their members, who spend just as much time preparing for committee, don't get a chance to ask a question. That's the only reason I'm asking the question.

I realize you didn't have a problem with it, but the Conservatives did, and I believe the Liberals did for their time as well.

• (1555)

Mr. Tony Martin: This is the first I've heard of the Liberals having a problem with it; they seemed to be okay with the last session.

The Chair: Hold on a second. Let me keep the list going here. I have Mr. Lessard and then Mr. Lake again.

Mr. Lessard.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Lessard: Mr. Chairman, I propose that we keep the system we'd already established. For the benefit of our colleagues, I will explain why this had been done this way.

[English]

Mr. Mike Lake: On a point of order, Mr. Chair, we already have a motion on the table.

The Chair: That's correct.

Mr. Lessard, we do have a motion on the table we need to deal with. We'll come back to you, and we can look at reintroducing that.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Lessard: I want to talk about his motion.

[English]

The Chair: Sure. By all means, yes.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Lessard: Can I talk about his motion?

Mr. Chairman, I think we must defeat this motion and come back to the motion that we'd adopted in the last two Parliaments. I say this for the following reason, Mr. Chairman...

[English]

The Chair: He's not talking.

Okay, sir.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Lessard: I will wait till my colleagues can understand this properly because this will be essential for the vote.

Here is what came out of the previous two sessions: the party in power has every opportunity to express its viewpoint, especially in the House of Commons, since the rules favour the party in power.

The committees exist so that opposition parties can also express their opinion and their wishes regarding bills which most of the time were tabled by the government itself. This proposal was made at the time so that the opposition could benefit from committees to do the work expected of it, and more specifically so that it could ask questions. Therefore, in our opinion, there is no reason to change the order in which questions are asked during committee meetings. Otherwise, the very nature of these meetings is being changed.

I would therefore urge my colleagues who are present here today to defeat the motion of our colleague Mike Lake. Afterwards, I will table a motion to maintain the order that has already been established.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lessard.

I think what we're trying to do is just this. We have 13 members who come to this committee who prepare to ask questions, and what happens is there is at least one Liberal and at least one Conservative every meeting who do not get a chance to do that, while the Bloc and NDP get extra rounds. All I'm suggesting is not that I don't think you should have the questions; it's that every member prepares for this committee equally, and they should have the right to be heard, if they're part of this committee, before we move on to second and third rounds. I'm going to leave it at that.

I'll put you back in the line—

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Lessard: Point of order, Mr. Chairman.

With all due respect, the fact that you are the chairman does not give you the privilege to speak after each one of our interventions. You must also place yourself on the list that allows each one of us to express ourselves. I've noticed that after each of our interventions, since the beginning of the debate, you intervene to give your opinion. It's fine that you can do so, but you should not be doing so in a privileged manner following each of our interventions.

[English]

The Chair: Well, we'll see.

An hon. member: Agreed.

The Chair: Mr. Lake.

Mr. Mike Lake: I was basing this a little bit on the motions from the foreign affairs committee, as an example, because last time it clearly didn't work. For some of us on this committee, on this side of the table, it was our first committee meeting when we went through the routine motions last time, and we maybe wound up with something that didn't quite work for everybody at the table.

I'm thinking now about what we do in public accounts, which seems to work very well, whereby the first round of questions actually has six questions in it. In that case it goes Liberal, Bloc, Conservative, NDP, Liberal, Conservative, so that the two larger parties get two questions in the first round and the two smaller parties get one each in the first round. Then we move into the second round and alternate between opposition and government, which is maybe a little bit more fair than what I proposed originally.

Who's on the speaking list right now?

•(1600)

The Chair: Right now we have Mr. McKay, followed by Mr. Martin, on the speaking list.

Mr. Mike Lake: Rather than move that as an amendment, I'm just going to throw it out there for discussion right now, and I'll let Mr.—

Hon. Geoff Regan: Could you repeat that?

Mr. Mike Lake: It would be Liberal, Bloc, Conservative, NDP, Liberal, Conservative.

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Is this on your second round or your first round?

Mr. Mike Lake: This is the first round, for seven minutes. Liberal, Bloc, Conservative, NDP, Liberal, Conservative—that would be the first round, for seven minutes each.

The Chair: So, as you said, the major parties get an extra question in round one.

Mr. Mike Lake: Right.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Mike Lake: Then, in the second round, we typically alternate between opposition and government. It's the opposition in general first, so one from that side of the table and one from this side of the table, for as long as we have left. Obviously our time constraints are sometimes a little bit interesting in this committee, given the number of witnesses we have.

The Chair: Next is Mr. McKay, followed by Mr. Martin.

Hon. John McKay: A number of proposals are flowing back and forth.

There are two principles involved here. The first principle is reflecting the size of the parties. The second principle is trying to be respectful of all members on the committee; they all prepare equally and presumably should get at least some opportunity to have a question in before you go to another round.

I'm using finance committee experience. Our finance committee experience looks very similar to yours in the first round, but in the second round we then go Liberal, Conservative, Bloc; then we go Liberal, Conservative; then Liberal, Conservative; then we go NDP. The reason is that you essentially then get through all the members of the committee and treat all members of the committee with some equality and also reflect their status in the House.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: I move that.

Mr. Mike Lake: Why don't you move that as an amendment, because I think that—

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: I sat on finance, and I like it.

Hon. John McKay: Then leave the first round as is. The second round would also be five minutes—Liberal, Conservative, Bloc; then Liberal, Conservative; then Liberal, Conservative; then NDP.

The Chair: Hold on a second. I've still got a list here. I've got Mr. Martin and Mr. Lessard on the list.

Mr. Mike Lake: Can I speak to the amendment?

The Chair: We're all going to be speaking to the amendment now.

Go ahead, Mr. Martin.

Mr. Tony Martin: I would agree with Mr. Lessard's comments earlier. I think you're being overly one-sided.

The Chair: Do you mean overly fair—trying to be reasonable?

Mr. Tony Martin: No, not overly fair. Now you're starting to.... You should listen. You're the chair—

The Chair: Tony, I am the chair, and it has not been fair and you were okay with that. Now I'm trying to make it fair.

Mr. Tony Martin: No, you're pushing—

The Chair: I'm not pushing. I think 13 members show up to this committee and 13 members prepare—

Mr. Tony Martin: Well, let them make that point.

The Chair: They are making that point, I believe.

Mr. Tony Martin: Okay. That's all we're asking. Mr. Lessard made a good point when he said that he and I should be allowed to finish what we have to say before you intervene and interject and start pushing your position. Okay? That's all I'm saying.

This committee worked well up until now, until today. This committee—what do you mean, “no”? We got through a lot of work, we travelled together, we heard a lot of witnesses, and we brought back to Parliament lots of reports and bills that were subsequently moved through that particular house as well.

This committee worked really well. Each committee is the master of its own destiny and decides on its own rules and how it's going to work together. Since I came here in 2004, this committee has worked well together. Some of us have been on this committee since then. Mr. Lessard and I have been two who have been on this committee all that time. It's worked well because there was respect for each party that came to the table. We allowed for a question; we all learned from the questions the others asked at this table.

I would suggest to you that if this is the way we're going to go now—that we're going to start having this reflect more the House of Commons and we're going to bring in these kinds of motions that make it more difficult for those of us in third and fourth parties to actually participate in the debate here—then this committee is going to get more difficult to manage. That's all I'm suggesting to you.

I would suggest that we stick with something that I felt.... It's funny, this is the first I've heard from Ms. Yelich that this committee didn't work properly. I've sat in on other committees and I've seen other committees actually collapse under some of the dynamic that was going on at those committees. That never happened at this committee.

We worked together cooperatively as a subcommittee. We worked together cooperatively on the agendas we adopted and we got through a lot of really important and good work. I don't know why we don't want to continue in that vein, in that spirit, and in that manner in this next session coming at us.

•(1605)

The Chair: May I speak now?

Mr. Lessard is next, followed by Mr. Chong.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Lessard: Before I make my point, Mr. Chairman, I have a question: did you find Mr. McKay's motion in order?

[*English*]

The Chair: It is an amendment to Mr. Lake's motion.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Lessard: Earlier, you refused mine, which amended Mr. Lake's motion. My amendment proposed coming back to what used to be done. I don't understand here.

[*English*]

The Chair: That was a whole different motion altogether, Mr. Lessard. This is an amendment to Mr. Lake's motion.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Lessard: I was making it to the amendment; it could easily be made to the amendment. I don't want to dwell on procedure, Mr. Chairman, but we should not end up in a situation where the two choices you are offering change what used to work well.

My colleague, Mr. Martin, raised this earlier. There are committees, where as you know Mr. Chairman, things went badly to the point where there were strikes. Certain committees refused to sit because things were going so badly. Ours worked well, and all of a sudden today, we're told that it didn't work well. When we left in the spring, you yourself said that this was one of the committees where we had accomplished the most work. The only heavier order of reference was that of employability, but we did complete all the others. The one on employability is under way.

I find it unfortunate that today, under false pretenses, there's an attempt to change what was working well and that effectively removes the democratic nature that characterizes this committee and was underscored by the chairman of the committee in the two previous Parliaments. It is in committees that the opposition has more opportunities to ask questions. It's the only place where it can truly do so. The party in power is there to respond, because it has the power. Mr. Chairman, I'm very surprised that this is being raised today. I'm also surprised by the arguments that you yourself are submitting. I'm very surprised, Mr. Chairman.

Is there a desire here to see what used to work well suddenly work badly? I don't think that that's your intention, but that will be the result.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lessard.

I would just like to say that this committee has worked well. There have been individuals from the Liberal and the Conservative parties that have come up to me and said, “Listen, we prepare for this committee every week, yet we don't get a chance to ask a question.” That's all I'm trying to reconcile today.

I wouldn't anticipate they would necessarily come up to individuals, but they have come up to me and said, “We prepare for this committee. We would like an opportunity to ask questions as well.”

Madam Bonsant.

[*Translation*]

Ms. France Bonsant: Point of order, please. Could this meeting be suspended? There are so many discussions around the table that no one is following what's going on and we're talking for nothing. Could we stop that right now and suspend the meeting? We will resume when everyone is sitting in his place.

•(1610)

[*English*]

The Chair: I have a list here. We're going to continue.

Mr. Chong, Mr. Lake, Ms. Yelich, and then Madam Bonsant.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Lessard: Mr. Chairman, my colleague raised a matter that has to do strictly with efficiency. I think that right now, it would be important to suspend the meeting so that on our side we can examine what's going on. I understand that there are members of the Liberal Party who are interested in speaking.

[*English*]

The Chair: Okay, I have the next person on the list.

Mr. Chong, followed by Mr. Lake and Ms. Yelich.

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): One of the fundamental principles of the House of Commons and its committees is the concept of representation by population. The fact is that the Liberals and the Conservatives on this committee, not including the chair, comprise eight out of the 11 members, or about 75% of the committee membership.

The way it was structured before gave us much less of a voice and a say on this committee in terms of interviewing the witnesses. So I think it's reasonable to go with what my colleagues Mike Lake and John McKay have proposed on the order.

Even in the proposed order we will be getting far less than our proportional membership on the committee would dictate. If we go with John McKay's suggestion, we'll be getting approximately 67% of the questioning in the first round. That's far less than our representation on the committee. To suggest that we should go in an order where we each get equal time is patently unfair.

With all due respect, I understand why my colleagues from the New Democratic Party or the Bloc might want equal time as us, but it's not fair. The fact is that we represent over 400,000 Canadians on this side of the table. The Liberals represent over 400,000 Canadians, and those Canadians have a right to have their elected representatives have a say in the interviewing of witnesses. To suggest that one member of this committee from one party should have equal say with four members of this committee from the government or four members from the opposition is not the way the House of Commons is supposed to operate.

We're coming forward with a change, but it's a reasonable change and it still underrepresents our representation on this committee with respect to the interviewing of witnesses.

I think we should proceed with the vote. If there is more discussion, let it happen, but I think we should proceed with either Mike Lake's proposal or John McKay's proposal.

The Chair: We have an amendment to Mr. Lake's motion, which is Mr. McKay's.

On the list I have Mr. Lake, Ms. Yelich, and Ms. Sgro. Let's go with Mr. Lake and then Ms. Yelich and Ms. Sgro.

Mr. Mike Lake: I want to get some clarification from Mr. McKay or somebody over there on what the amendment is right now.

Hon. Geoff Regan: It's Mr. McKay's amendment.

The Chair: The first round would be the same as it is. The second round would follow with a Liberal, a Conservative, a Bloc, a Liberal, a Conservative, a Liberal, a Conservative, and then an NDP, for five minutes each.

Hon. Geoff Regan: When you say the first round would be the same as it is, don't you mean that the first round would be as proposed in the motion?

•(1615)

Hon. John McKay: That's what he meant.

Hon. Geoff Regan: So the second round is what he proposes to change with the motion. The first round would be the same as it is in Mr. Lake's motion.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Mike Lake: That's what I'm trying to clarify, because my understanding was that we were looking at a change to what I'd suggested in my comments. I wanted to make sure we were clear on the difference between the motion and the comments.

My understanding is that the amendment is based on what I was saying in my comments, so the amendment would mean that the order in the first round of seven minutes would be Liberal, Bloc, Conservative, NDP, Liberal, and Conservative. The order in the second round of five minutes would be Liberal, Conservative, Bloc, Liberal, Conservative, and NDP. At that point, after the last Conservative in the second round, every single person would have had an opportunity to ask questions once, and the NDP member would be the first member at this table to get a chance to ask questions twice. In fact, if we only had two rounds he would be the only member to get a chance to ask questions twice. I just want to clarify that.

Mr. McKay, does that reflect your amendment?

Hon. John McKay: Yes, that reflects my rationalization.

The Chair: Ms. Yelich is next, and then Ms. Sgro.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: I just want to get on the record that I think the committee worked well. But from the outset, when we decided to set up the speaking times, going back to our first committee meeting, it was debated then as well. But we weren't able to make it clear that it was unfair until we actually had meetings. Then the meetings revealed that it was really an unfair way to handle committee meetings where, as Mr. Chong said, the government was not represented.

The Chair: Ms. Sgro.

Hon. Judy Sgro: Mr. Chair, I'm hearing the different conversations here on the fact that this committee has done some very good work and everyone has worked well together. In essence, then, I'd like to suggest that we adjourn this discussion until Monday, at our meeting.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Are you suggesting or moving?

Hon. Judy Sgro: I am moving that we do that, and that in the interim we try to work something out that will satisfy all of us around the table. We can continue to move forward in a positive manner and recognize the issues that have been raised. We can come forward with a couple of suggestions on Monday and maybe resolve the issue, rather than going back and forth and trying to sort something out at the moment.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Lake.

Mr. Mike Lake: It's non-debatable, right?

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: There was already a motion on the floor. That has to be voted on before—

Hon. Geoff Regan: No, no, a motion to adjourn takes precedence and is non-debatable.

The Chair: It's non-debatable, yes.

There is a motion to adjourn.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: So we're adjourned until Monday.

Published under the authority of the Speaker of the House of Commons

Publié en conformité de l'autorité du Président de la Chambre des communes

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