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The Honourable Michael Chong

Standing Committee on Official Languages

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•(0845)

[Translation]

The Chair (Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC)): Welcome to the Standing Committee on Official Languages. This is our 25th meeting. Today is Tuesday, February 14, 2012, and we are here to continue the work of the committee.

We will continue debating Costas Menegakis' motion and Mr. Harris' amendment.

Mr. Aubin, go ahead.

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair. Welcome home and welcome to the committee. I hope that jet lag is a thing of the past, or almost. In any case, we are very happy to see you again. I am very pleased to see Mr. Menegakis among us again.

I don't know if everyone is absolutely set on me wishing you a happy Valentine's Day, but I am somewhat bothered by commercial holidays. If Valentine's Day helped people connect, that would be the best thing we could gain from it. Although I may respect you, gentlemen, I am not in love with you. I want that to be clear.

That being said, I want to extend a special welcome to Mr. Menegakis. I think that his presence in the Standing Committee on Official Languages is absolutely necessary for us to resolve the matter we have been debating for a few meetings already. That's because he is the one who moved this motion. I want to remind you that the motion asks "that all committee business of the committee be conducted in camera." We have been divided on that issue since the motion was moved, since its interpretation could be very broad.

I would like to provide a very brief summary to begin the meeting, since we are lucky to have new members at the table.

Mr. John Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, CPC): Mr. Chair, a point of order.

Since Mr. Menegakis is back, I am wondering whether he could explain what "all committee business of the committee" means. I think that there may be a misunderstanding. This could help with the committee business.

[English]

The Chair: It's clear what the motion reads: "That all Committee business of the Committee be conducted *in camera*."

I don't think we need an interpreter to tell us what that means.

Is there another point of order?

Mr. Costas Menegakis (Richmond Hill, CPC): I want to be abundantly clear that my motion speaks only to the 10 or 15 minutes

per meeting that we take to discuss the housekeeping business of the committee, not the entire two hours. That was very clear to the opposition members when I made my motion, and unfortunately it got lost somewhere in the translation.

The Chair: Thank you for that intervention. I think we're getting into debate here, but I'm going to allow Mr. Bélanger to have the floor.

Go ahead. You just said point of order.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): No, I said that is not a point of order.

The Chair: Sorry, I misunderstood you.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Exactly. It's not a point of order. It's your clarification that doesn't stand.

The Chair: The chair is trying to speak.

In both cases I think we're getting into debate. I think the motion and the amendment are clear.

Without further ado, I'll return the floor to Mr. Aubin.

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Aubin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I will try to bring some context to the debate we have been engaged in for a few weeks already. This morning, we once again have new members joining us at this table. I don't know whether that is a sign of interest in the Standing Committee on Official Languages, but it looks like every Conservative representative may come, one by one, to spend some time here.

This is the third lecture of the democracy 101 course, but let's quickly go back to the second one in order to summarize what we talked about last time. First, I pointed out how outrageous the motion was and said I felt that introducing the motion would be like using a canon to kill a fly. Then I tried to explain whom and what we were fighting for in order to prevent this motion from being adopted. I will not go back over all that, out of respect for those who were here. I guess those who are really interested could consult *Hansard*. *Hansard* is actually the first issue I will discuss this morning, since that is what I began talking about when the previous meeting ended.

I also talked a lot about and provided a few excerpts from the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*. I think that those excerpts clearly illustrated the importance of the right to freedom of speech we as members of this house have, be it in our House of Commons or committee work. I want to remind you that freedom of speech does not exclude in camera proceedings. I even shared some examples where proceeding in camera is not only allowed, but preferable. On this side of the table, we are never against a portion of the committee business being conducted in camera. That is a long-standing practice. What divides us is this motion asking “that all committee business of the committee be conducted in camera.” Therefore, I spent a long time talking about the right to freedom of speech and its importance.

We also discussed the proposal for an open government. Regarding that, I brought up some government documents intending to demonstrate the idea of openness the government wants to implement in its relationship with Canadians. We felt—and I still feel—that this completely contradicts the motion before us.

I dare not talk about fighting because the word seems to be too strong. However, when I first spoke in defence of the right to freedom of speech, I spontaneously used the expression “marathon of indignation”. What I meant was that, as long as I drew breath and was allowed to speak, I would try in every possible way, imaginable and unimaginable, to defend this vision.

The first idea that went through my head was to appeal to those for whom I feel I am speaking. I am talking about Canadians from across the country who are increasingly facing restrictions, not only on their right to speak, but also on the information they are given. Then, I posted on my personal Facebook profile a letter inviting people, those who feel that my current marathon must continue, to write me, to give me their opinion and fuel my efforts. I wanted to be absolutely certain that what I am saying is still relevant and current, not only to those who elected me in Trois-Rivières, and whom I hope to represent as much as possible, but also to people from across the country who elected all the members and want our work to be public.

● (0850)

People also want the media to be able to report on that work. Although some Canadians watch the CPAC channel regularly and follow our work very closely, most people prefer the summaries provided by the media. People obtain enough information from those summaries to form an opinion about topics that play a part in their everyday lives and in the country's political development.

I talked a lot about the CPAC and ParlVU channels. I stopped when I was about to begin talking about *Hansard*. All those tools have been implemented over the years by the government to make politics a public interest. It seems to me that, if we were to use in camera proceedings almost systematically, we would be throwing away huge amounts of money by not using so many tools available to parliamentarism.

I wrapped up my comments with a third element that makes the openness mentioned earlier and the public's awareness of our work possible, *Hansard*. I would like to take a few minutes to read a document about *Hansard's* origins, its purpose and its bilingualism—which is completely relevant because this is the Standing Committee of Official Languages. It is of the utmost importance

that Canadians across the country be able to not only receive information, but also receive it in one of the two official languages we defend so passionately. That's probably what confuses me the most in this marathon. I definitely feel I am fighting a fundamental fight, that of freedom of speech. At the same time, I am aware that the real work this committee should be doing is somewhat on hold for a few hours. I think that, faced with such disastrous options, we have to be brave enough to establish priorities among the issues. I hope that we will get back to doing our work properly, so that we can once again defend the rights of people who belong to linguistic minorities across Canada.

First, I want to get back to *Hansard*, the ultimate transparency tool. The following is stated:

Hansard is the name traditionally given to official transcripts of parliamentary debates in Westminster-type governments. In fact, a *Hansard* is kept not only at the Parliament of the United Kingdom and its regional institutions, but also the Oireachtas of the Republic of Ireland, the Parliament of Canada and the country's provincial legislative bodies, the Parliament of Australia and the parliaments of the Australian states, the Parliament of South Africa and the country's provincial institutions, the Eastern African Legislative Assembly, the New Zealand Parliament, the Parliament of Fiji, the Legislative Council of Hong Kong, the Parliament of Malaysia, the Parliament of Singapore, the Legislative Council of Brunei, the Parliament of Sri Lanka, the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago, the Kenya National Assembly, the National Assembly of Tanzania, the Parliament of Ghana, the Parliament of Uganda, the Parliament of Zimbabwe, the Parliament of Mauritius and the Senate of Jamaica.

I assume that the list may grow over the next few years. The reason so many parliaments are equipped with this tool for information dissemination is certainly not to have in camera proceedings preventing people from reading the records of their proceedings.

● (0855)

Now, I will talk about *Hansard's* origins:

Before 1771, the British Parliament had long been an extremely secretive legislative body.

Imagine my surprise at reading that! I thought I could not have been more informed about the topic at hand. I was wondering whether this was a matter of going back to the future, or going from the future to the past, back to a parliamentary culture where as many proceedings as possible would have been secret. That way, neither side's position would be heard.

On the contrary, I am more of the opinion that, in a healthy democracy, truth emerges from the clash of ideas. That expression says it well. We should not be afraid of ideas clashing. We must certainly stop perceiving opinions that differ from ours as personal attacks. They are not personal attacks, just different ways of seeing an issue. It's a good thing those debates can be held publicly.

I will continue reading about the history of *Hansard*:Parliament's decisions were of course made public, but there were no records of debates. What is more, disclosing remarks made in the House was seen as a breach of parliamentary privilege, and was punishable by both houses. Since an increasing number of people were becoming interested in parliamentary debates [...]

I hope that is still the case today.

[...] more and more individuals started publishing unofficial accounts of those debates.

We have all played telephone at least once in our lives. We know what can become of information when it does not come from an official and reliable source. We know that, when information is passed on through word of mouth, it changes with every person.

It is likely that, on days when we proceed in camera, members will not be able to speak publicly about the work done in committee. When it comes to public opinion, even the media, that may be enough to give rise to theories, since there would be no way to check what was really said. Everyone would have their own theory, and each would be just as plausible as the next, just as close to or as far from reality as the next. *Hansard* is the very remedy for this twisting of information. It is a credible, official and easy-to-find source.

I will continue reading. I was just saying that a number of unofficial debate accounts were being published.

Authors would at worst be fined.

I hope we have not gotten to that point.

Some of them presented the parliamentary debates as debates of fictitious societies or bodies. For instance, the debates were published under such titles as *Proceedings of the Lower Room of the Robin Hood Society* [...]

There was something colourful about that, but it doesn't mean I want to go back to that time.

[...] and *Debates of the Senate of Magna Lilliputia*, Samuel Johnson's column in the Gentleman's Magazine.

In 1771, Brass Crosby, then Lord Mayor of London, summoned a printer, by the name of Miller, who dared publish reports of parliamentary proceedings.

He was subject to a fine.

He released the man, but afterwards, he himself was asked to appear before Parliament to explain his actions. Crosby was imprisoned in the Tower of London, but during the trial, a number of judges refused to hear the case, and following public protests, Crosby was released.

Parliament stopped forbidding the publishing of its debates, in part thanks to John Wilkes' campaigns for free speech.

● (0900)

A few centuries later, we are having the exact same debate—without the same fears, of course. I do not fear being imprisoned. I also don't think that anyone will be fined. At least I hope it will not come to that. Nevertheless, the right to free speech is still at the heart of our discussions this morning. It is of the utmost importance that, in a democratic society like ours, we not give up any ground gained in the fight for freedom. I will continue reading:

Then, there were several attempts to publish reports of debates. Among early successes, the *Parliamentary Register*, published by John Almon and John Debrett, ran from 1775 to 1813.

William Cobbett, a well-known radical and a publisher, began publishing *Parliamentary Debates* in 1802 as a supplement to his *Political Register*, which itself dates back to the *Parliamentary History*.

I did not have time to go to the Library of Parliament to see whether there was a copy of all those publications, but I think it would be interesting to read a few excerpts to you some day, for cultural purposes.

Cobbett's reports were printed by Thomas Curson Hansard from 1809 [...]

Now we're getting somewhere. You see that this word did not come out of nowhere. It came from a very important historic figure.

[...] in 1812, with his business suffering, Cobbett sold the *Debates* to Hansard. From 1829, the name "*Hansard*" appeared on the title page of each issue.

Neither Cobbett nor Hansard ever employed anyone to take notes of the debates. Their information came from many morning newspaper sources. For that reason, early editions of *Hansard* should in no way be considered a reliable source for the content of parliamentary discussions.

So, historically, there is support for the argument I advanced earlier. We absolutely need an official tool everyone can rely on to know what truly happened and what was really said. We definitely need those texts so that there is no room for interpretation and so that the source is unquestionable, unless the speakers are unclear. Equipping ourselves with such a tool only to then prevent its use by saying that *Hansard* will not be available for any meetings of the Standing Committee on Official Languages because the proceedings were held in camera seems to be a procedural flaw, if not a discrepancy between our wishes and our actions.

Hansard was remarkably successful in keeping out competition such as Almon and Debrett, and later *Mirror of Parliament*, published by J.H. Barrow from 1828 to 1843. Barrow's work was more comprehensive, but he checked each speech with the members and allowed them to "correct" anything they wished they had not said.

It's pretty interesting. I hope we won't revert to that practice either.

The last attempt by a commercial rival was *The Times*, which published debates in the 1880s. In 1889, Parliament decided to subsidize *Hansard's* publication so that a permanent record would be available. From then on, *Hansard* included more speeches, with those delivered by ministers being reported practically verbatim.

That was an important historic moment. One day, a decision was made to use public money to fund the transcripts of proceedings, so that everyone could have access to them. It was also a matter of preventing the truth and reality from being revised or corrected as parliamentarians wished, under the claim that it was not exactly what they had said or meant to say. So, what is said is said. Pilate said that what has been written, has been written.

Therefore, *Hansard* contains a reliable translation and account of our discussions and debates.

● (0905)

The *Hansard* of today, a fully comprehensive account of every speech, began in 1909, when Parliament took over the publication. At the same time, the decision was made to publish the debates of the two houses in separate volumes, and to change the front cover from orange-red to light blue.

Even then, the colours were portentous. It is anyone's guess as to why.

In 1980, new technology led to a larger page format being introduced.

That isn't very important, but I thought I'd mention it anyway.

Hansard in the United Kingdom

Hansard is not a verbatim account of the debates in Parliament. Its terms of reference are those set by a House of Commons parliamentary committee in 1893, as being a report

"which, though not strictly verbatim, is substantially the verbatim report with repetitions and redundancies omitted and with obvious mistakes corrected, but which, on the other hand, leaves out nothing that adds to the meaning of the speech or illustrates the argument."

Unfortunately, I feel that my words will take up a few pages in our minutes of proceedings for a negative reason, but also for a positive one. The negative reason is that we must fight this motion with all the civilly acceptable means available to us. That's a point of debate and not of battle. I repeat that the motion asking "that all committee business of the committee be conducted in camera" is completely unacceptable to us. My right to speech is probably the most civilized way to speak out not only for myself, but also for all like-minded people.

To that end, it would be my pleasure to take a few minutes to read some letters sent by Canadians in response to the appeal I launched a week ago.

I will continue reading. Let's look at an example of redundancy. By the way, I myself will possibly have made a few redundancies five or six hours into the marathon. I apologize to the illustrious assembly listening to me. However, you can be sure those redundancies will not appear in the *Hansard*, so those who want to follow the course of these epic proceedings will not have to suffer the repetition. One such instance of an eliminated redundancy involves the calling of members in the House of Commons. In that house, the Speaker must call on a member by name before that member may speak, but *Hansard* makes no mention of the recognition accorded by the Speaker. However, *Hansard* sometimes adds notes to make the remarks less ambiguous. For example, though members refer to each other as "the hon. member for *X constituency*" rather than by name, *Hansard* adds, in brackets, the name of the member in question the first time that member is referred to in a speech or debate. When a member simply points at another whose constituency he or she cannot remember, *Hansard* identifies the member and his or her constituency.

That makes up for the memory lapses we often have, since there are 308 members. If each of the 308 members had a constituency that was one word long, there would be only 616 names to memorize. However, some ridings have four or five names, such as the Montmagny—L'Islet.... You see, I am already drawing a blank. Those names go on and on.

An hon. member: Kamouraska

Mr. Robert Aubin: That's it. Teamwork makes us stronger.

Interjections from seated members are generally not included in *Hansard* [...]

I'm sorry, but your interjection may not appear in *Hansard*. Nevertheless, I thank you for it.

[...] unless the member who is speaking at the time refers to it.

I did my part.

Any interruption to debate, whether a member's shouts or the physical invasion of the chamber, will be designated by the word "Interruption".

Political correctness is maintained.

Hansard also publishes written answers made by government ministers in response to questions formally asked by members. Since 1909—and prior to that for important votes only—*Hansard* has listed how members have voted in divisions. Furthermore, the proceedings and debates in committee are also published in separate volumes.

For many years, the House of Commons *Hansard* did not formally acknowledge the existence of parties in Parliament, except indirectly, when members would refer to other members of the same party as "hon. friends". That changed in 2003, and members' party affiliations are now identified.

● (0910)

The *Hansard* of the House of Lords operates entirely independently of its Commons counterpart, but with similar terms of reference. It covers parliamentary business in the House of Lords itself, as well as the debates in the Moses Room,

known as the "Grand Committee". Parliamentary written answers and statements are also printed.

The Internet, with the help of volunteers, has made the UK *Hansard* more accessible. The UK *Hansard* is currently being digitized for on-line publication. Since June 2000, it has been possible to review and research the UK *Hansard*, with the exception of standing committees. It is also possible to set up key word email alerts for topics of interest, or to receive emails whenever a given MP speaks in the Commons or receives an answer to a written question.

What about Canada's *Hansard*? Did we copy the UK *Hansard*? Is there anything about our *Hansard* that applies specifically to our objectives? Here's something about that:

House of Commons differences from UK practice

As with the Westminster *Hansard*, the Canadian version is not strictly verbatim, and is guided by the principle of avoiding repetitions and redundancies, and correcting obvious errors. Unlike UK MPs, Canadian MPs are referred to by the parliamentary riding they represent—for instance, the member for Oak Ridges-Markham—or by their cabinet post. *Hansard* provides [...]

● (0915)

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière, CPC): Mr. Chair, a point of order.

The Chair: Yes, Mr. Gourde?

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Mr. Chair, things have gone a bit far.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Gourde.

We have Mr. Harris' amendment before us. Therefore, we have to discuss it.

Mr. Aubin, go ahead.

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Chair....

The Chair: Yes, Mr. Godin?

Mr. Yvon Godin: I don't know whether you are accepting this point of order. I feel that what Mr. Aubin is saying is totally relevant to the motion, which is about in camera proceedings and the right to speak. I don't think this constitutes a point of order.

The Chair: I simply said we had to discuss the amendment. I did not say whether Mr. Aubin was doing that or not. I am just repeating the rules. We currently have Mr. Harris' amendment before us, so we have to discuss it.

Mr. Aubin, go ahead.

Mr. Robert Aubin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I think my comments are totally relevant to the amendment and the motion. I am repeating that because we might have lost track since I began speaking. My argument is very clear. I am trying to show as clearly as possible that I am at a loss. Our government says it wants a policy of openness. For that reason, it has equipped itself with clear instruments that promote this openness—*Hansard* being one of them. However, that same government is proposing a motion on in camera proceedings.

I will continue:

Hansard provides other information, name and political affiliation, the first time a member takes the floor that day [...]

I will not read all the examples.

Given the bilingual nature [...]

In that case, if there is no...

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Mr. Chair....

The Chair: Yes, Mr. Gourde?

M. Jacques Gourde: Regarding openness, several Conservative members on this side of the table feel that a lot of time is being wasted. I would like us to move a unanimous motion to stop debating this motion, so that we can continue studying the roadmap, which I feel is very important. We still have many witnesses to hear from and submission deadlines to meet.

I would like to have the committee's unanimous consent to adjourn the debate and continue our main study.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Mr. Chair, a member must have the floor to move a motion.

The Chair: Yes, but he is asking for unanimous consent. Do we have unanimous consent?

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: If he withdraws the motion, the result will be the same. He can move it again.

[English]

The Chair: I don't think a member can withdraw a motion. In order for this debate to collapse, we need a motion that the debate be adjourned. So if there's unanimous consent to move that motion, I'll grant the floor to Monsieur Gourde.

There's no unanimous consent.

[Translation]

Mr. Aubin, you have the floor.

● (0920)

Mr. Robert Aubin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Given the bilingual nature of the Canadian federal government, two Canadian *Hansards* are maintained, one in French and one in English. This makes *Hansard* a natural bilingual concordancer, and it is often used to train French-English machine translation programs. In addition to being already translated and aligned, *Hansard* is large in size. New material is also always being added. All that makes *Hansard* an attractive corpus. However, its usefulness is hindered by the fact that the translations, although accurate in meaning, are not always literally exact.

As my grandfather used to say, it is always better to get the information straight from the horse's mouth. That requires our work to be public in most cases. I want to reiterate that the Standing Orders provide for the situations when we can proceed in camera, or when it is preferable to do so. But those situations are far removed from the motion we have been divided over for a few days.

And if all those openness tools we have given ourselves are not enough—it is almost strange that an NDP member must talk about this, but I am doing so because, for once, I must recognize the Senate's wisdom—I will read a short section of the Rules of the Senate of Canada regarding committees. You will see that the wording is incredibly specific:

92. (1) Except as provided in sections (2) and (3) below, all meetings of Senate standing and special committees shall be held in public and only after public notice.

There is an old saying we often use: what is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander. I assume that what's good for the upper house should be just as good for us. I repeat:

[...] all meetings of Senate standing and special committees shall be held in public and only after public notice.

Reference is made to sections (2) and (3), which I read to see what the exceptions were. Section (2) says the following:

(2) Except as provided in section (3) below, a standing or special committee may decide [...]

It is not automatic; we may decide.

[...] to hold an in camera meeting to discuss its business only when the agenda deals with any of the following:

- (a) wages, salaries and other employee benefits;
- (b) contract negotiations;
- (c) other labour relations;
- (d) other personnel matters;
- (e) consideration of any draft agenda; and/or
- (f) consideration of any draft report of the committee.

I think that the two last items I listed, (e) and (f), are totally relevant to Mr. Harris' amendment, where he asks:

That the motion be amended by adding after the words "in camera" the following: "with the consent of at least one member of the opposition or a vote by the committee at the start of any sitting where committee business is to be discussed".

The committee must be given the agenda, become familiar with the meeting content and decide whether proceeding in camera is necessary.

Section (2.1) says the following:

(2.1) Meetings of the Committee on Conflict of Interests for Senators shall be in camera unless the committee accepts the request of the senator [...]

That is less important. I don't think this is a conflict of interest situation.

Section (3) says the following:

(3) Meetings of subcommittees of any standing or special committee:

(a) except as provided in sub-paragraph (b) below, shall not be subject to the provisions of section (1) or (2) above [...]

(b) when clause-by-clause consideration of any bill is before the said subcommittee, shall be in public.

● (0925)

So the rule is that the meetings are public, and the exception is that they can be in camera if the members agree. Once again, that is exactly what Mr. Harris' motion says. We will continue to have public meetings, unless a request to go in camera is accepted, "with the consent of at least one member of the opposition or a vote by committee at the start of any sitting of the Committee where committee business is to be discussed".

I will leave it at that. But I still think that it is important to draw attention to the wisdom of the upper chamber, whenever appropriate.

I have also briefly looked through the papers in an attempt to find out whether the issue we have been grappling with for a number of hours is an issue only for the Standing Committee on Official Languages. Let me remind you that I came up with two hypotheses about our disagreement. The first one was that we are subject to this motion because the government party wants to impose an ideological vision. I was hoping this hypothesis was false and I still hope so. My second hypothesis was that this motion—and, as a result, this amendment—are the outcome of a procedural disagreement that we were not able to resolve among ourselves. So the solution was to take an arbitrary and high-handed approach to resolve it by moving a motion that could be summed up as “Shut your mouth”. I hope that is not the case either.

As I looked through the papers...

Mr. Jacques Gourde: A point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Gourde.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: I hope that those words—more or less parliamentary—that came from Mr. Aubin will not be in the report.

The Chair: Yes, Mr. Bélanger?

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: That is not a point of order, Mr. Chair.

[English]

The Chair: Let's all try to use some restraint language so we don't inflame our passions.

I'll give the floor back to Monsieur Aubin.

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Aubin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I was not directing those words to anyone in particular. It was just a feeling that I had. If anyone around the table, whatever their party, was offended by those words, I would gladly take them back, but that does not change what I think.

So let me go back to the newspapers I looked at. I found an article that I would like to share with you. It is very short. And it was published in *Le Devoir* on December 14, 2011. That is still quite a long time ago. The title is “Government wants committees in camera, complains opposition”. The article reads as follows:

First gagged, then blindfolded: the opposition is criticizing the government's attempt to force parliamentary committees to go in camera, far from the eyes of Canadians and reporters.

The New Democratic Party (NDP) and the Liberal Party have criticized in unison the total lack of transparency on the Harper government's part, a government that is abusing its majority and that wants to control everything in Parliament with an iron fist.

Although the rule has been to hold most of the parliamentary committee proceedings in public, the Conservatives are trying to make that the exception, adds the opposition.

On Tuesday, a Conservative MP on the government operations committee moved that all future business be conducted in camera.

As an aside...

● (0930)

Mr. Bernard Trottier (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, CPC): A point of order.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Trottier.

Mr. Bernard Trottier: Mr. Chair, he did not quote the motion correctly. It says “the Committee business of the Committee”. It is the same motion.

The Chair: That is not a point of order.

Mr. Bernard Trottier: I ask that it be corrected because it is not true.

The Chair: That deals more with the debate.

So I am going to go back to Mr. Aubin.

Mr. Robert Aubin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It seems ill advised to correct a journalist on the job. I am reading an article from *Le Devoir*. If it does not faithfully report the motion, there is nothing I can do about it.

So I will continue to read what was published, as I said, in *Le Devoir* on December 14, 2011. I will read the last sentence again in order to pick up the thread:

On Tuesday, a Conservative MP on the government operations committee moved that all future business be conducted in camera.

That's where I left off. As an aside, let me say that, as much as I have been rejecting my first hypothesis—and I reiterate that I still want to reject it—when I read this article and see that our committee is not the only one subject to such a motion, I must admit that my concerns are growing. That is the end of my digression. I will go back to the article:

The public would only be able to see witnesses who bring their expertise to parliamentarians. But they will not be able to know why those witnesses were selected, why others were excluded, and, more importantly, why the committee chose to do some studies and not others.

It seems to me that this is exactly what Mr. Menegakis' motion means: “That all Committee business of the Committee be conducted in camera.” If that's the case, then I agree with the article:

The public would only be able to see witnesses who bring their expertise to parliamentarians. But they will not be able to know why those witnesses were selected, why others were excluded...

It seems to me there is a blatant lack of transparency.

I will continue reading:

Going in camera also prevents MPs from discussing what takes place behind the closed doors.

The same manoeuvre was used on the official languages committee, a committee that has no state secrets to hide...

We have to remember that national security was one of the top criteria not only for going in camera, but also for almost automatically choosing to go in camera. That's just common sense. And it seems pretty obvious that, although the issues the Standing Committee on Official Languages is dealing with are significant, we are not talking about national security.

Let me go back to the article:

The same manoeuvre was used on the official languages committee, a committee that has no state secrets to hide, noted Yvon Godin, NDP MP on the committee.

As to whether other committees have been affected, Liberal MP Marc Garneau said that it was possible, but he could not talk about it...given that it was in camera.

Mr. Chair, this simple answer is very telling of how the culture of secrecy is trying to become established and certainly at the expense of our freedom of speech and the quality of our parliamentary work.

I am going back to the article:

In House today, government leader Peter Van Loan denied the allegations, saying that the government was acting in a transparent and responsible way, drawing sniggers from the opposition.

That is the end of the quote from the article published in *Le Devoir* on December 14, 2011.

In light of this article, there were a number of comments from the public, as is increasingly the case with blogs popping up everywhere. I will read you some of the comments in response to the article, because they give me the energy I need to keep on fighting. Actually, person by person and comment by comment, I have realized that our fight is just.

Raymond Saint-Arnaud, a subscriber to *Le Devoir*, posted a comment on Wednesday, December 14, 2011 at 5:50 p.m., with the title "The Canadian parliamentary system is very sick". This title is repeated as the first sentence: "The Canadian parliamentary system is very sick". That is not my repetition, but Mr. Saint-Arnaud's. I would imagine that the idea behind the repetition was to reinforce it. I continue with Mr. Saint-Arnaud's reply:

Mr. Harper shows contempt for real parliamentary institutions by forcing parliamentary committees to go in camera.

Mr. Harper is a budding dictator.

As I said, it was signed Raymond Saint-Arnaud.

● (0935)

This is what another subscriber wrote:

Follow the rules to the letter?

If the opposition keeps following the rules of Harper's parliamentary system, they will be fleeced.

There might be some anonymous leaks...

You can draw your own conclusions.

On the same day, Wednesday, December 14, 2011, NL said the following:

Not just a lack of transparency, but an attempt to assimilate...

...it is a manoeuvre allowing the government to infringe on constitutional language rights.

It is an attempt to undermine Canadian "bilingualism"... to undermine the fundamental right to use French in parliamentary proceedings.

The risk is that none of the people present at a committee like that will be able to publicly say that the Conservative majority is imposing English on everyone as the only language of work.

If a witness was true to their conscience and made this public, they would be found in contempt of Parliament for breaking the in camera rule.

Mr. Chair, I can honestly tell you that I don't agree with the comments in that reply. However, I think that it is a clear example of the shift that would take place if we were forced to go in camera and transcripts would no longer be available to check what really was said, what the person speaking actually thought. The information would not be consistent from one person to another.

Let's see what Pierre Rousseau wrote on Wednesday, December 14, 2011. He titled his answer "Defenestration of democracy!!!" original as it may be. I for one had trouble understanding it, but the following lines might make it clearer:

It is unbelievable to see how this majority government (with less than 40% of the votes cast) insists on governing behind closed doors in order to hide as much as possible from the voters' watchful eyes! That is starting to seem like full-blown

paranoia. We can say that Canadian democracy (as rickety as it might have been) is about to go out... the window!

I guess those last few words explain the title.

Here is another reply called "Good old dictatorship":

How we miss it! No need to think anymore, no need to vote anymore, everything in the hands of our enlightened duce, the demigod of the Rockies. Canada could be right up there with North Korea. We would have statue contests.

If it was a joke, I would probably find it distasteful and I would not feel like laughing. The problem is that those types of comments are now publicized because people feel really wronged when it comes to their right to access to information. We obviously cannot expect all Canadians who follow politics a few minutes a day, or a few hours a week, to have a completely informed and defined opinion on all the issues at the core of Canadian politics. Imagine how things would be if they did not have access to a reliable source of information. I worry that this type of shift will become more pronounced and everyone will lose out.

● (0940)

Mr. Guy Lafond suggests some sort of remedy:

A very good training course is currently being given to the public service of Canada. It is called "Adventure in Leadership". It is only a few days of training that can go a long way when it comes to parliamentary matters.

Something to think about...

Pierre Coutu talks about a Canadian spring. It is the spring that we all await, but that is probably not going to come this morning. So we have to keep our hearts warm this Valentine's Day, since we cannot warm our bodies in a public square.

A Canadian spring?

I would be happy with a Quebec spring, but okay, for humanity's sake, getting rid of this government would be a blessing! They are so mean it makes you sick...

But we knew that before the election (prorogations and other questionable tactics). So where are those 40% Canucks, who essentially supported them?

Mr. Yvon Godin: A point of order, Mr. Chair.

I ask that we suspend the proceedings for about 10 minutes to discuss.

[English]

The Chair: We've been asked to suspend the committee for

[Translation]

five minutes, is that it?

[English]

Mr. Yvon Godin: For 10 minutes.

[Translation]

The Chair: Is it the will of the committee to suspend the sitting for 10 minutes?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[English]

The Chair: We're suspended for 10 minutes.

● _____ (Pause) _____

●

● (0950)

The Chair: We're coming out of suspension.

[Translation]

We are resuming the debate on Mr. Harris' amendment.

Mr. Aubin, the floor is yours.

Mr. Robert Aubin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Before we continue, I would like to check something. It seems I have unanimous consent to move the following motion: That the debate on the motion and the amendment be adjourned and that the Committee resume the planning of the study on the evaluation of the Roadmap: improving programs and service delivery.

If I have unanimous consent, I so move.

The Chair: Thank you.

Is there unanimous consent to support this motion?

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: We will continue with the agenda. We have to discuss the future of the roadmap.

Before the break, we heard from 30 witnesses, but there are 117 on the list in total.

We have approximately 28 meetings before the summer break, which means 14 weeks. We have less than \$5,000 left in the budget for this study. As chair, I may have to go before the Liaison Committee to ask for more money to continue this study.

As chair, I need direction from the committee on two issues. I need to know how many sittings you would like to keep and what types of witnesses you would like to hear from.

Mr. Godin, the floor is yours.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

If we look at the number of witnesses we have heard from and at the number of meetings that we have had, I think we have to look at when we need to complete this study.

I suggest we tighten everything up and we prepare to hear from witnesses who would allow us to get this done. For example, we could hear from departmental representatives based on our needs. We have never gone over the list of witnesses together. I have personally looked at the list of witnesses, which was very long, and I have reduced it to 22 witnesses. We could even reduce it further.

But we should hear from people from departments, like ministers, who should come and tell us their points of view on the roadmap.

In terms of communities, we have met with all the key people. Of course, they are all key people, but we have to draw the line somewhere.

I think we should hear from certain people and finalize the report on the roadmap.

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

Then we will hear from Mr. Trottier.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I agree with my colleague Mr. Godin. I suggest that after next week's break, we focus on hearing from the remaining witnesses in the three or four weeks that follow.

I agree that those witnesses should come from the agencies and departments that are part of the roadmap. I am particularly interested in knowing where they are in their summative evaluation with the communities that they were supposed to have completed by the end of January or the end of February, if I'm not mistaken. This is an important step in the evaluation of the roadmap.

Since our next block of work occurs in March, we will have the results of those evaluations required by the roadmap. At that point, we have to get to work on a report. I do not necessarily want to impose this in a draconian way, but our analyst could perhaps begin the report and, when we get back from the other break, we could come back in camera to study the report as required.

I don't need to hear from representatives of the 16 or 17 agencies or departments, just the main ones. I had also asked for a document and I hope that it will be available soon. I wanted to get a report of the expenses made in the three first years of the roadmap. Three years are now complete, and the fourth finishes at the end of March. We could at least have the report of the actual expenses for the first three years of the roadmap. Perhaps that would let us determine more precisely which departments or agencies we want to hear representatives from.

So, if that's the way we are going, you will have my full cooperation.

● (0955)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Trottier, the floor is yours. Next is Mr. Aubin.

Mr. Bernard Trottier: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I think that the suggestions made by Mr. Godin and Mr. Bélanger are reasonable. For our part, we have heard a good sample of the groups who have received funds through the roadmap. We could perhaps add some interviews with other witnesses so that we have a more complete picture of those who have received funds.

As to the departments and agencies that have participated in the roadmap, it is important to have a sample. As Mr. Bélanger said, it is not necessary that all departments be involved in the evaluation, but we should look at it along two axes. There is the vertical axis, that is to say the departments that have distributed the funds, and there is a horizontal axis—which more or less corresponds to the format of the roadmap—meaning the horizontal involvement within the departments. We have to hear witnesses give us their point of view.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Aubin has the floor. Next is Mr. Gourde.

Mr. Robert Aubin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

First I want to thank and congratulate everyone for getting back on cordial terms. It feels good. Thank you.

I agree with what has been said previously. To me, it seems important that our priority be to meet representatives from the departments so that we have the clarification we need to read and understand the upcoming mid-mandate report and make appropriate projections for the continuation of this roadmap.

Only agencies and departments can give us the additional information that we are presently lacking. Of course, if we had unlimited money and unlimited time, we would be able to hear from other organizations, but I still think that we have done a relatively good job of looking after the interests of each of the minority communities in the country.

The Chair: Your turn, Mr. Gourde.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Given that it is Valentine's Day, I am also happy that we have reached an agreement so amicably.

I am in favour of hearing from representatives from the departments, and I think that it would be right and proper to do so. But I would like to make sure that some groups who have not come to meet with us feel free to do so after the statements from the departments. We would not want them to feel left aside given that they have indicated a desire to come and provide us with testimony.

I know that the list of witnesses is quite long, but perhaps they will not all indicate a desire to testify. After hearing the testimony from departmental representatives, perhaps some will have had their questions answered. But others might have things to present to us. I will leave it to your discretion to judge who can come and who cannot.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Gourde.

Your turn, Mr. Godin.

Mr. Yvon Godin: I agree with Mr. Gourde. But I understand that the list was prepared by each political party. If we ask 100 people if they want to come, they will all say yes. I don't think that's what we want. Of course I am in favour of hearing from those who really want to come.

I have an idea. Perhaps we should adjourn the sitting and everyone should go and take a good look at the list. On Thursday morning, we will have another meeting and we will see what progress we have made. We will see how much we can reduce it. We must not have too many of them if we want to produce the report. We must remember that this committee has been working on this since September. We have to get the job done. If we go by the list of 100 witnesses, we are going to be hearing from them until June. That makes no sense. I've never seen a study last so long.

Anyway, I do not know if Mr. Bélanger shares my opinion. We can wait and see what he has to say, but I think we are going to have to focus on certain names. Perhaps Thursday would be a good day for that.

•(1000)

The Chair: I think Mr. Godin's idea is a good one. It is a little late to invite witnesses for Thursday; that's in two days. If we meet on Thursday, we can ask the clerk to prepare a schedule for the three

weeks after the break. We can then talk about the kinds of witnesses that we want to invite.

Go ahead, Mr. Bélanger.

[*English*]

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Mr. Chairman, I have a couple of things.

In response to Monsieur Gourde's suggestion and Mr. Godin's comments, I would suggest that we consider notifying two groups, QCGN, which represents the anglophone minority, and the FCFA, which represents the francophone minority, that we might call them back after we've heard from the agencies and departments. QCGN, incidentally, has asked to come back. I don't know if you've seen that letter, Mr. Chairman.

This way we don't need to go to the 100 or so other witnesses, because these are the two umbrella groups that represent our linguistic minorities across the country. I think we could ask them to do that work after they've heard the agencies and departments that are coming before us.

Furthermore, we are in the nation's capital. Some departments might be prepared to come Thursday. I would hope that we would check this out so that we don't spend the entire day Thursday just deciding what we're going to do for the following three weeks. If it's not possible, fine. Remember, though, that we presumably have departments and agencies coming in from this region, which means we won't have to go back to the liaison committee to get more funds.

The Chair: I'm going to pass the floor to Monsieur Gourde and then to Mr. Harris. I need to get some direction here. I'm getting two different ideas of where we should go.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gourde, do you prefer Mr. Godin's suggestion for Thursday, or Mr. Bélanger's? I can invite the witnesses from the Department of Canadian Heritage and the other departments, or I can decide that the Thursday meeting will be in order to discuss a schedule.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Mr. Chair, I am sure that you are going to do everything you can in order to have witnesses on Thursday, but no one expects the impossible.

[*English*]

The Chair: What I'll do then is ask the clerk to make his best effort to invite witnesses for Thursday. What I will also do at Thursday's meeting is distribute a schedule of proposed witnesses and time slots for the next four or five weeks, so that by the end of March we can conclude this study and have a discussion of the draft report. At Thursday's meeting, if you have input on the schedule and you'd like to see something slightly different, just come to me after the meeting and tell me what you'd like to see. We'll try to incorporate those suggestions and changes.

Monsieur Godin.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvon Godin: I have no objection to hearing from witnesses on Thursday, if it is possible.

In the meantime, however, we should all look at our list so that we are able to submit names. If the witnesses do not come, we can use Thursday's entire meeting. If they do, and if they finish early enough for us to have time left, we could get back to work and look at the list. We could also talk to each other about what we want, what you want, and maybe reduce the list as much as we can.

• (1005)

The Chair: You can talk to me about it.

[*English*]

If there's no further business of the committee, thank you for the direction.

This meeting is adjourned.

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