

Point of Order—Mr. Lewis

House as soon as it is received by a Member. Nowhere does it say that the member who presents the petition has to be the one who receives it in the first instance. I think it is quite clear, Mr. Speaker, that you do not have the authority to make a ruling which clashes with the clear words of the Standing Orders of this House.

Some months ago when members attempted to present to the House all the petitions they had received on a subject on the same day, Government spokesmen got to their feet and raised a point of order saying that this was of questionable validity because it unduly ate up the time of the House that otherwise would be available for Government business and other proceedings. Today, however, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Government House Leader is saying that there is something wrong if instead of trying to present all your petitions on the same day you do a few at a time so as to take up less time on any particular day.

● (1140)

Just what is the Government after? I hate to suggest this, but I wonder if the Government is not trying to choke off an elementary right of Canadians and an elementary right of opposition Parties on their behalf to petition Government through Parliament. Why else would the Deputy House Leader raise this rather strange point of order which flies in the face of the clear language of the Standing Orders and also flies in the face of the position taken by the Government months ago when members attempted to present petitions to the House as soon as they were received, no matter how much time it took on any particular day? The Hon. Member cannot have it both ways. I say that Hon. Members do not have to do this, but if the Deputy House Leader wants members to present petitions as soon as they receive them, the Government cannot complain about the time being taken up on any particular day when time is being used for that purpose.

The Deputy House Leader for the Government is saying that somehow or other, people who present petitions to the House through Members of Parliament are aggrieved if those petitions are not presented very soon after they are signed and sent here. Quite apart from the fact that the Standing Orders do not require that this approach be taken, if there is any complaint about when a petition is presented, it is a complaint of the person or persons signing the petition, not of the Government to whom that petition is addressed. The Parliamentary Secretary to the Government House Leader certainly has no mandate to raise this point allegedly on behalf of those presenting petitions. As I have said, the complaint, if there is any complaint, is solely that of those who have signed the petition.

It might be argued that the rules also indicate that members can simply table petitions and file them with the Clerk, but that is an option to be used at the discretion of the member who wishes to present the petition. It is not something that can be imposed upon any member by the Government. To suggest that, is a total distortion of what the rules say and a total distortion of the right of petitioning Parliament. It is certainly

a total distortion of the role of Government and Opposition in a democratic Parliament.

I have said before that since members of the present Government came into office they have through various means attempted to operate as if this were some type of one-Party state. That was not the case after the election and it is not the case now. Certainly this is confirmed every day by public opinion polls. It is not proper for the Government to try to tell members that, rather than using their own judgment or the judgment of those signing petitions about presenting petitions in open sessions of the House, they must instead file them with the Clerk. That is the choice primarily of the Member of Parliament who wishes to present the petition.

The Parliamentary Secretary has complained that since last fall seven hours have allegedly been used for presenting petitions. As has been pointed out, this is not a lot of time compared to the total number of sitting hours since then. But what concerns me is that he implied that using this time to present petitions is somehow wasting the time of the House. Yet, at the beginning of his remarks, he was ready to admit that one of the most fundamental rights of people in Canada is the right to petition the Government through Parliament about their concerns. It cannot be both a waste of time and a fundamental right to be exercised according to our rules.

I conclude by saying that not only do the rules clearly permit what the Hon. Member is complaining of, but also that if you accept as well founded the point of order of the Hon. Member, Mr. Speaker, the result will be to choke off the rights of Canadians to petition the Government and the rights of opposition Members to speak on behalf of people who wish to petition the Government.

Why is the member who is speaking on behalf of the Government so sensitive about this issue at this time? One can only conclude that government Members fear the voices of the Canadian people. They want to choke off the voices of ordinary Canadians. We in the Official Opposition do not intend to let them do that. We want to make sure that those voices can be heard through petitions and through Members of Parliament until the time comes when the voices of Canadians are heard during an election and this thoroughly bad Government is thrown out of office.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Robert Gauthier (Ottawa—Vanier): Mr. Speaker, I would like to add a few comments because the matter is of some interest to me. As Hon. Members are aware, I am one of those members who present a considerable number of petitions in this House, petitions that are often taken up by people in my riding. I will not name the various subjects they deal with, but I think a look at the record will show that I have presented petitions on many occasions.

Mr. Speaker, to find a statement on the right of petitioning, we must refer to *Parliamentary Rules and Forms*, Beauchesne's 5th edition.