

*Question of Privilege*

here on Monday and would make a statement on those aspects of his trip upon which he considered it necessary to report. I am not suggesting that the Prime Minister knew at the time that the Secretary of State for External Affairs had arranged for a press conference this afternoon.

Together with all other hon. members, particularly those sitting on the opposition benches, I am becoming more and more enraged by the attitude of the members of this government toward parliament.

**Some hon. Members:** Hear, hear.

**Mr. Lewis:** It is not unreasonable to expect that when a minister of the Crown makes a special trip abroad to meet the governments and authorities of other countries on matters about which we do not know he ought to report to the House of Commons before he reports to the press, and that the members of this house have a right to hear him before the press does.

I made some inquiries about the time of the minister's arrival in Ottawa. I cannot be sure about the details, but I am told that he arrived in Ottawa before the house started its sitting this morning at eleven o'clock. But whether or not he did—and I think my information was pretty reliable—the Prime Minister knew perfectly well that the house would agree to revert to motions at any time during the day, even during an allotted day, for the opposition to hear a report from the Minister. The minister could have come here at two o'clock and given us his report, after which he could have gone to the press conference at four o'clock.

I want to know what it is that is making the government act this way. I said in an interview which was published in an Ottawa paper some time ago that I had the impression that the present Prime Minister really had no use for parliament, that it was a kind of necessary unavoidable evil for him to have to appear in the House of Commons and to allow the other ministers to waste their time here. This is the way it seems to me that he looks at the situation. Every time there is an important matter about which parliament should hear, we read about it in the press before the minister involved appears in the house to tell us what he is doing. Why are the ministers of the Crown so insistent on downgrading the purpose and usefulness of parliament, particularly of the poor hon. members who sit behind the treasury benches, who I understand are going to meet to see whether

they cannot persuade the government to assign some role to them in parliament which will lessen their frustration?

**Mr. Cullen:** On a point of order, Mr. Speaker—

**Mr. Lewis:** Mr. Speaker, I am on a question of privilege.

**Mr. Cullen:** The hon. member is berating the backbenchers, but I think he has already put his question of privilege and now we are hearing a harangue about his feelings. I think he should confine himself to his question of privilege.

**Mr. Lewis:** The hon. member is taking a little too much upon himself in telling other hon. members how to put their questions of privilege. I have not been here many years longer than he has but perhaps he should wait a little before giving that kind of presumptuous advice.

My question of privilege concerns every member of this house, including the hon. member who just rose so plaintively to make a point that had no point to it. I do not understand why the government should treat parliament in this cavalier fashion. I cannot understand why the government chooses to downgrade the value of the house and to prevent the possibility of comment on what they do. The only conclusion I can come to is that the Secretary of State for External Affairs would much rather speak to the press than face the Leader of the Official Opposition and the spokesmen for the other parties.

There must be an end to this practice. On occasion ministers make announcements outside the house when they cannot avoid it. I am the last person in the world to berate them for that, but when this house is in session on the day on which the minister comes back from a trip, then it is to this house that he ought to make his report and not outside it.

I protest in the strongest possible terms against what is happening. I say that the thing to do is for the house to declare its readiness to revert to motions at four o'clock and invite the Secretary of State for External Affairs to come here at that time to make his statement and delay his press conference for half an hour.

I should like to move therefore—and I do not have my motion in written form:

That the house agree to revert to motions at four o'clock and invite the Secretary of State for External Affairs to appear before it to make a report on his overseas trip.