

On February 2, 1993, placed in my House of Commons desk were the responses to the aforementioned petitions. These responses were received 298 days and 270 days respectively after tabling the petitions.

Standing Order 36(8) reads:

The Ministry shall, within forty-five days, respond to every petition referred to it.

I emphasize the word "shall". In the practical guide "Petitioning the House of Commons" which all members are given as a guide to collecting and tabling petitions section 2(6) reads:

Whenever a petition is presented, a copy is sent to the Privy Council Office which then forwards it to the appropriate government department or agency so that a response can be prepared.

The response must be tabled in the House of Commons within 45 days after the petition has been presented.

This guide is prepared by the Private Members' Business Office. Again, I draw your attention to Standing Order 36(8) which says that the ministry shall give a response within 45 days.

The government does not have to agree with the petitioners, but I think the government must show respect, interest and concern for the over 3,000 Canadians who signed these petitions on an immigration matter. The minister responsible is really showing contempt for the House of Commons orders by not responding.

We cannot operate that way, Mr. Speaker. The rules were put here to provide law and order, to provide for things being processed in an orderly fashion so that Canadians get a response in a decent time.

Mr. Speaker, if you find, and I hope you will, that I do have a prima facie case I am prepared to move the appropriate motion.

Mr. Jim Edwards (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of State and Leader of the Government in the House of Commons): Mr. Speaker, I do not have the immediate facts before me to comment on the substance of the grievance of the hon. member. He is quite correct that Standing Order 36(8) reads as he quoted it.

I want to point out that responses to petitions have been coming forward at a phenomenal rate, some days in the hundreds. It may have something to do with the over-burden of responses. However, I will undertake to

investigate the question and see whether it can be expedited.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. member for Parkdale—High Park has raised a matter which has been raised before in this House. There is a rule as the hon. member referred to it and read it to the House.

With this kind of application which is an application to the Chair to find that the privileges of the hon. member have been breached because there has not been a response to a petition within the number of days set out in the rules the difficulty is that there is no sanction in the rules. The Chair has had to say in the past that it is extremely difficult to come up with a lawful response.

I have said in the past and I hope I am not going to have to say it in the future but I echo again what the hon. parliamentary secretary said. The rule is there and for whatever reason it has not been complied with. It was not put in there in the first place I am sure with the intention of not being complied with but as the hon. member who has brought the application knows, this is not the first time the Chair has had to deal with it.

The best way to deal with it at the moment is to accept the undertaking of the parliamentary secretary that he will make an inquiry—I hope it will be an immediate inquiry—and that he could raise the matter again perhaps some time tomorrow.

Mr. Flis: Mr. Speaker, I am wondering if the parliamentary secretary while he is looking into this would consider discussing this in the House management standing committee because certain ministers cannot flout the rules of the House this way. They owe it to Canadians.

No wonder Canadians hold parliamentarians and the whole government process in such low esteem when after 200 days I have no response for the over 3,000 Canadians who signed the petitions. My role as a member of Parliament is being thwarted. I am not very effective when I cannot get a response within 45 days.

I am treating this very seriously and I am not sure whether the petitioners once they hear that I have raised this question of privilege will not follow it up.

Mr. Speaker: I want to assure hon. members that the Chair is not treating it other than as a serious matter. I am calling to the attention of hon. members that there is a rule. There is no sanction. It may very well be that it