

Point of Order—Mr. Lewis

redress. If that is not deliberately misleading the House, it comes as close to deliberately misleading the House as anything in my experience.

Mr. Speaker: I heard very carefully the words of the Hon. Parliamentary Secretary, which were “if that is not deliberately misleading the House”, it comes very close to it. The Hon. Parliamentary Secretary is also as close to getting out of order as he can be. I will take account of the very careful wording he used, but I would ask that he be extremely careful as he continues his remarks.

Mr. Lewis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I take your admonition.

As I said earlier, we have no difficulty with the legitimate presentation of petitions. However, I would point out that in the month of February an hour and a half of the time of the House was spent on the presentation of petitions. Since the opening of this Parliament on October 1, almost seven hours of House time have been given to this procedure. The Hon. House Leader of the New Democratic Party can hardly complain about the lack of time for debate when we find that it is being wasted in this manner.

I suggest that the delaying of the presentation of petitions in order to pretend that a long-standing issue exists is a cheap political trick. It is a complete fabrication and a charade. It is an attempt to mislead the House and the Canadian public.

I further suggest that the practice of distributing petitions to other MPs by the member who certified them, in order to pretend that there is an issue of widespread concern, is also a cheap political trick, a complete fabrication and charade, and an attempt to mislead the House and the Canadian public.

The holier than thou New Democratic Party will stop at nothing for partisan political purposes. The rights of petitioners mean nothing to them. The rights of Parliament mean nothing to them. The reputation of their fellow Members of Parliament who present petitions are completely disregarded. I call upon the Chair to examine this practice and to stop what I consider to be a complete abuse of the House.

I suggest the Chair rule that in the future petitions must be presented in a timely fashion by the Member of Parliament who certified them. In the alternative, I suggest that Your Honour might want the Standing Committee on Elections, Privileges and Procedure to review the matter to safeguard the rights of petitioners to timely presentation of their petitions to the Crown and Parliament, rather than subject them to cheap partisan political tactics by members of the New Democratic Party.

Mr. Rod Murphy (Churchill): Mr. Speaker, in summing up, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Government House Leader said that since October 1 members of all three Parties have used a total of seven hours to present petitions. He has made it sound like they have taken a large amount of time. If the Government were so concerned about the amount of time it needs for government business, it could have called the House

back in September. Seven hours over as many months is not a large proportion of time. I do not think the Parliamentary Secretary has a legitimate point in that area.

Opposition Members have complaints with regard to the Government, and I should like to refer to one example. Sometimes we wait a very long time to get answers from the Parliamentary Secretary to questions we have placed on the Order Paper. Yet, we have avoided the tactic of getting up every day and asking when a question will be answered. We have not wasted House time on that. It is a legitimate right of opposition Members to rise and ask when the Parliamentary Secretary will finally answer a particular question.

With regard to the substance of the matter raised by the Parliamentary Secretary, and in that he mentioned that I have risen on a number of occasions, in my particular case one of my petitions was certified in January and it took me approximately two months to present it. He should also realize that I have had from a very small population riding over a thousand people who have written on this particular item. They do not come on one piece of paper. They come in on pieces of paper with two or three names or five or ten names.

This means that it was not a petition which I circulated on November 1 and brought into the House on November 6. In truth, people are still writing in to me, signing petitions, and expressing their grievances with regard to the Government. If we used the Gallup polls, I would suspect that there is an increasing dissatisfaction with the Government over the passage of time. People who used to vote Conservative and are concerned about issues are people who are now supporting us and writing to us.

I understand the Government's concern that we do not present petitions right away. It is a legitimate concern of the Government. However, I think our petitioners would want us to make as effective a use of the presentation of petitions as possible. The people who sign petitions would understand if—and today I could have done so on behalf of Churchill, Pikwitonei, Flin Flon, and The Pas, Manitoba—I rose a week or two later, or perhaps even later, to present petitions on behalf of people in some of those same communities and in other communities expressing their particular grievance with the Government.

In the case of the patent drug legislation, over 1,200 people from my riding alone have signed petitions. They did so on November 6, December 15 and in January. Obviously some people are still signing petitions today and I will continue to present them in the House. This issue is still before the House. Legislation will soon be studied at report stage and then we will have third reading. It is an active issue and an issue on which we have a right to present petitions.

● (1130)

The other matter raised by the Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Privy Council (Mr. Lewis) has to do with the habit, practised by some members, of circulating petitions.