

Point of Order—Ms. Copps

in a way it did not have to previously—is going to be respected, not only in terms of the technical definition of what constitutes a comprehensive response but in the spirit of reform.

The spirit of the reform is that the Government would make its position clear at a predetermined time with respect to the recommendations of a particular committee. In this case, I do not think anyone can argue this has been done.

The problem is that this is not the first time the Government has chosen this particular way of not responding to a committee's recommendation. My concern, for the record, is that over time this will become the habit, and the intention of that reform, which was to make Governments more accountable to the recommendations of committees—even if it disagrees with those recommendations—in the sense that it would be required to give a comprehensive response, will be lost by virtue of the practice now developing as a result of decisions being taken by the Government to not respond in the way that was intended by the reform committee when it made this recommendation.

Therefore, I simply say to you, Mr. Speaker, that you have a responsibility, as well as the Government, as do we all whenever the onus falls on us, to live up to not only the letter but to the spirit of those reforms. In this case, I think there is a strong case to argue that that has not been done.

[Translation]

Mrs. Lucie Pépin (Outremont): Mr. Speaker, I am somewhat surprised by the remark of the Hon. Member for Simcoe North (Mr. Lewis) who is saying that one of the reasons why we object to the explanation as to why the report has not been tabled is that we seek to delay the debate on immigration. When we see that the Minister to whom the reprimand is directed is not even in the House, that he has left, I wonder if this is not simply a slap in the face and whether he reflects the attitude of the Government—

Mr. Speaker: Please! The Hon. Member will appreciate that it is not appropriate to refer to the presence or absence of a Minister or of an Hon. Member.

Mrs. Pépin: I simply want to draw the attention of the House to the fact that it is one of the most important reports, that the report on day care centres is urgent. We have been waiting for it, and people have been telling us that for months. The Government also seemed to realize the importance of day care centres. But as it happens it is one of the very few reports to which the response was not produced in due time. So we do have serious reservations. I can understand that federal-provincial relations must be protected and respected, but as a rule when the federal Government wants something it shows leadership. One of the things for which the Conservative Government has been censured in this instance is its lack of leadership with respect to day care centres.

So allow me to repeat the question: Is this not a demonstration of the Government's lack of leadership in the case of day care centres? We are told a more comprehensive response will be forthcoming this fall. I would not even call this an interim

report, it is a letter, barely two-page long, addressed to the chairperson of the committee. So I am surprised, I am astonished, and I am very anxious to see where the priorities of the Government are and when it will take action concerning day care centres.

● (1530)

[English]

Mr. John Nunziata (York South—Weston): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to make some very brief submissions on the point of order raised by my colleague the Hon. Member for Hamilton East (Ms. Copps). It seems to me that the issue before you, Mr. Speaker, is whether or not the Government was in breach of Standing Order 99(2). If you come to the conclusion that the Government has in fact breached that particular Standing Order, the question then becomes what the sanction ought to be.

The facts are as follows. The Special Committee on Child Care of the House of Commons undertook a comprehensive look at the day-care system in Canada in order to make recommendations to the Government. On March 30, 1987, that Special Committee tabled in the House its report.

Under Standing Order 99(2), the Government is required to table a comprehensive reply to a report from a Standing Committee or a Special Committee within 150 days. For the record, Standing Order 99(2) reads as follows:

Within 150 days of the presentation of a report from a standing or special committee, the government shall, upon the request of the committee, table a comprehensive response thereto.

We must ask ourselves why Parliament in its wisdom decided to enact Standing Order 99(2). I think the reasons are obvious.

Parliament does not want to see the work of its Standing or Special Committees simply gather dust on some Minister's shelf as has happened in the past. In order to validate the work of a Special Committee such as the Special Committee on day care, Parliament decided to enact this particular Standing Order. I should remind you, Mr. Speaker, that the language of the Standing Order is mandatory. The word "shall" is used. It is not permissive. It is not up to the Government to decide whether or not it should file a comprehensive response within 150 days.

It is obvious why Parliament in its wisdom chose 150 days. It wanted to ensure that the Government had sufficient time to respond to such reports. I think that 150 days or five months is in this particular case sufficient time for the Government to respond to each and every recommendation of this Special Committee.

This afternoon, some Hon. Members have tried to determine whether or not the reply of the Minister dated July 28 was comprehensive. I think it is obvious for a number of reasons that this "Dear Shirley" letter to the chairperson of the