

Mr. Deans: Well, we can still do it. We could attempt to find an alternative date on which to have the debate as quickly as possible, perhaps even to agree on a time limit in order to have the debate dealt with in a reasonable way and not have the animosity that is quite evidently growing in the House of Commons continue.

Mr. Lewis: Madam Speaker, I enter this debate in support of my colleague, the Hon. Member for Yukon (Mr. Nielsen). The Government House Leader made the point in reply that they were having great difficulty finding Private Members to bring forward their Bills.

I would remind the Government House Leader that during Question Period, in reply to questions from the Hon. Member for Elgin (Mr. Wise) with respect to amendments to the Bankruptcy Act put forward by the Hon. Member for Lambton-Middlesex (Mr. Ferguson), which are going to be debated tomorrow, the Minister of Finance (Mr. Lalonde) gave him great credit. Great credit does not go anywhere unless the Private Members' hour can go forward. Therefore, the Government House Leader is eliminating the Private Members' hour during which there is going to be consideration of a Bill which will help the farmers of Canada.

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POINT OF ORDER

MR. MAZANKOWSKI—ANNOUNCEMENT OF GOVERNMENT POLICY OUTSIDE HOUSE

Hon. Don Mazankowski (Vegreville): Today once again we have witnessed a callous affront to this institution of Parliament by a very autocratic Government. This is the fourth occasion that a very important matter of substantive Government policy having to do with very major changes to Western grain transportation has been announced outside the House.

I remind you, Madam Speaker, that such similar announcements were made back on February 8, 1982, June 28, 1982, August 4, 1982, and again today we had a very, very substantive announcement.

Once again Parliament has been circumvented. I believe major announcements of Government policy should be made in this House of Commons. The fact of the matter is that the issue itself is very complex. It has raised a number of important questions, questions which Members on all sides of the House should have an opportunity to clarify, but the answers that we received to questions on this very important subject in the House today have been far from satisfactory and far from complete.

I draw your attention to Standing Order 18(4) at page 13, where is outlined, as it is even in the Business of the House, the procedure for calling for Statements by Ministers. Just to reflect on that for a moment, Standing Order 18(4) provides:

(4) On Statements by Ministers, as listed in section (3) of this Standing Order, a Minister of the Crown may make a short factual announcement or statement of government policy. A spokesman for each of the parties in opposition to the government may comment briefly thereon and Members may be permitted to

Point of Order—Mr. Mazankowski

address questions thereon to the Minister. The Speaker shall limit the time for such proceedings as he or she deems fit.

That is a very, very important function of the parliamentary process, a function which has been denied as a result of the actions of this Government.

Madam Speaker, I draw this matter to your attention and I wish you would take it under advisement. It is not the first time that I have raised it, and I will continue to raise it because it does impair our ability to discharge our responsibilities as effective Members of this House of Commons.

• (1520)

Hon. Yvon Pinard (President of the Privy Council): Madam Speaker, the Hon. Member has raised a very interesting question. I congratulate him on the way he raised it and on the way he has explained it. Unfortunately, the Standing Order to which he has referred indicates that there is a discretion that can be utilized by a Minister. A Minister does not have to make a statement, but "may" make a statement. I quote from page 13 Standing Order 18(4):

—a Minister of the Crown may make a short factual announcement or statement of government policy. That is consistent with the previous Standing Order 15.

Many rulings have been made by the Chair to the effect that there is that discretion. On the other hand, I agree with the Hon. Member for Vegreville (Mr. Mazankowski) that more often in this House we should witness statements made by Ministers, allowing a short, controlled debate on the subject of policy raised in the statement.

Unfortunately, at least since I have been dealing with House business, first as Parliamentary Secretary and then as House Leader, there have been demonstrated abuses with regard to the length of time used in dealing with comment on the statement, causing the Government often to lose a whole day which could be used to deal with urgent business. Possibly we could agree at some point. It would be possible for any reasonable spokesman from the Opposition to negotiate in advance a reasonable length of time for questions and remarks following such a statement in order to allow the Government to proceed with additional business on the day the statement is made. It would then be possible for Ministers to make more statements in the House. I will be open-minded to that kind of discussion or agreement.

For the time being, unfortunately, we have on one hand Ministers who do not want to spend a whole day in the House on a statement while the Government has a pressing necessity to deal with urgent business. On the other hand, we would like to allow the Opposition the opportunity to express its views and to ask questions.

I am not saying that this opportunity does not exist even when Ministers make statements outside the House. Questions can be asked in Question Period of Ministers that particular day or on days following. This Friday will be an Opposition day. The Opposition will have the opportunity of raising this matter in their motion. Nevertheless, I would be open-minded