

Point of Order—Mr. Gray (Windsor West)

was going to be made by the Minister today and is the official critic for the New Democratic Party, be given the maximum advance notice. A few minutes prior to a Minister's Statement is insufficient. I would urge the Government House Leader and the Parliamentary Secretary to the Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. Lewis) to ensure that this type of discourtesy not occur in the future.

Mr. Doug Lewis (Parliamentary Secretary to Deputy Prime Minister and President of the Privy Council): Mr. Speaker, first, with respect to the question of a Minister's statement occurring on allotted days, I would point out to the House that there is no loss of time because the time of adjournment is extended. That, therefore, deals with that argument.

Second, and I make this point specifically to the House Leader for the Liberal Party, I would point out that in 291 days of the thirty-second Parliament there were 28 ministerial statements. In 304 days of the 32nd Parliament, during which we were in Government, there were 83 ministerial statements.

Ms. Copps: What is the point?

Mr. Lewis: The point very simply is this, Mr. Speaker. We are making ministerial statements in the House and not at some university campus so that opposition spokespersons have equal opportunities to reply.

Third, there was an hour's notice. I would point out to the House that neither critic responding on behalf of his Party took part in Question Period and, therefore, schedules were not disrupted.

Mr. Gauthier: How would you know that?

Mr. Gray (Windsor West): What a dumb statement.

Mr. Lewis: Did they?

Mr. Mazankowski: If you don't want to have the statement, we can forget it.

Mr. Lewis: I think we have tried wherever possible to accommodate our colleagues, Mr. Speaker. I think the point has been made and we should continue and hear the Minister's statement.

Mr. Sergio Marchi (York West): Mr. Speaker, I rise on the same point of order. I think what the Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Privy Council (Mr. Lewis) is trying to do is hide behind a facade. This is not an isolated case. This Minister also happens to wear the hat of the Minister of Immigration as well as the hat of the Minister of Employment. On February 20 when he announced changes to the immigration program as it relates to refugees, he pulled off the very same routine. As critic for immigration for my Party I had only one-half hour notice of the statement. The statement was not made in the House of Commons, as the Parliamentary Secretary is trying to indicate. It was made at a press conference on a Friday at 10 o'clock. Not only was there only half an

hour notice but there was not even ample opportunity for the Official Opposition to respond because, by the time the opportunity arose, it was 11 o'clock and time for Question Period in the House. This is not an isolated case on behalf of this Minister and it is not a case where the Opposition is against ministerial statements.

Ms. Copps: Relax, Maz, Mr. Nice Guy.

Mr. Marchi: What we are trying to tell this Minister and other Ministers is that there needs to be due process and there needs to be ample opportunity for the Official Opposition to respond constructively, as is our responsibility. We are simply not able to do that when we have only 20 or 30 minutes at the most to look over a statement and give a response on behalf of Canadians. That is simply not good enough. It is time the Government began to show some responsibility to the House of Commons and to the traditions that we value.

● (1530)

Mr. Rod Murphy (Churchill): Mr. Speaker, I rise on the same point of order. If this were an isolated case, I do not think members of the Opposition would be upset. However, this has happened time after time. Just last week, a statement was made by the Minister of Finance (Mr. Wilson) on equalization. Even the Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Privy Council (Mr. Lewis) did not know what would happen that day.

Mr. Lewis: That's incorrect.

Mr. Murphy: You did know?

Mr. Lewis: Don't put words in my mouth.

Mr. Murphy: The problem is that on a continuing basis, we are getting very late notice of statements. The fact that it is happening on an Opposition Day is upsetting as well. In addition to that, I believe the Minister is trying to make the statement today because he knows that a committee of the House which has studied this matter for many, many months will be making its report tomorrow, and that is also upsetting.

Mr. Speaker: Naturally I have listened with care to the interventions that have been made. I think the Hon. Minister would like to respond to the point of order and I will hear the Minister. I think the point Hon. Members wished to make has been made and I certainly have heard it. I will now hear the Hon. Minister and perhaps that will be sufficient for the Chair.

[Translation]

Mr. Bouchard: Mr. Speaker, when I asked for the paper to be distributed, it was 2.15 p.m., which is the beginning of Oral Question Period. The document was distributed. Did it reach my colleagues opposite at 2.18 p.m.? I feel courtesy is not a matter of 30 or 42 seconds. Courtesy is a matter of using the time available. I think Hon. Members have had about an hour