

Routine Proceedings

anything that would upset the normal flow of the House while, presumably, the Liberal caucus and the New Democratic caucus are being briefed by a representative of the Department of National Defence.

Mr. Andre: Mr. Speaker, I certainly have no difficulty at all in giving my assurances. As the debate proceeds, it is solely for the purposes of providing members on all sides, and independent members also, an opportunity to get their views on the record. There will be no dilatory motions or an attempt to take advantage of the fact that membership on the other side may be light because of the briefings that are going on.

• (1110)

Mr. Riis: Mr. Speaker, presumably we are going to continue the debate in the House prior to the opposition parties being briefed by the Department of National Defence. Would it not seem more reasonable in terms of an informed debate for us to suspend the sitting for a couple of hours so that—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Riis: Mr. Speaker, I am trying to make a case for the most informed, intelligent debate possible and that requires information. I realize the government has had an opportunity to be briefed, presumably by the Minister of National Defence and the Prime Minister. We have not. I am simply making a case to my friends opposite that this is a very critical moment.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Riis: I am taking some offence at the laughter with regard to this proposal, Mr. Speaker. It is a serious suggestion to my hon. friend, the government House leader, that we consider suspending this session for two hours—goodness, what is going to be discussed for the next two hours is not going to be necessarily earth shattering, I suspect—to allow the opposition to be briefed and then commence the debate immediately after Question Period.

Mr. Andre: Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member knows, and we have had these discussions in private, I would like to take advantage of this time to provide opportunities for those members, both on our side and independent members, to put their views on the record. Again I repeat, members have my assurance that during that period of time there will be no attempt by anybody on this side of the House to take advantage of limited

numbers on the other side with any dilatory motions. That assurance is given.

I think we can proceed and provide this period of time for members who wish to get their views on the record and I would suggest that we proceed in that manner.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Jean Lapierre (Shefford): Mr. Speaker, I happened to hear that briefing sessions were offered by the Minister of National Defence to two caucuses. Does this mean the sessions were available to all members? I find it hard to understand, considering the fact that it is now 11.10 a.m. and the briefing was supposed to be for 11.30 a.m., why none of us was informed.

Mr. Speaker, all partisanship aside, I think we should realize that there are now a number of independent members in the House, and if co-operation and good will are to exist in a forum that is so faithful to tradition in times of crisis and war, I should hope the government would be able to show a little more sensitivity and co-operation.

[*English*]

Mr. Andre: Mr. Speaker, I would just like to say to the hon. member that I will certainly discuss with him and with the Minister of National Defence the provision of briefings for all members. That was not the intention. The intention was to have the briefings in a different atmosphere than in the adversarial system we have in the House. In so doing, hon. members could be apprised of all of the information available. This institution, because of its adversarial nature and what have you is frequently not the best place in which we could have those briefings. That was the intent, nothing more than that.

I will talk to the hon. member, and I am sure that arrangements can be made to ensure that he and other independent members who are interested are provided with the same sort of briefing that will be transmitted to the other caucuses.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gauthier: Mr. Speaker, with respect, our message is clear: All members of this House are entitled to this information. I fully agree with the hon. member for Shefford that, to obtain that information, we can use a provision of the Standing Orders that allows the minister to come and make a statement.