

Point of order

statement the House Leaders could co-operate in finding an appropriate time to respond.

[Translation]

Mr. Marcel Prud'homme (Saint-Denis): Mr. Speaker, it is clear to those who respect this House as we do . . .

[English]

As it is your duty, Your Honour has made a very reasonable proposal to the House; not cutting off the debate tomorrow morning or this afternoon. Your Honour has made a sound and reasonable proposal that will meet all the requirements and the traditions of the House, which is to have at least a few moments of reflection. It is not enough only to read the statement. My colleague who is the critic will want to consult for at least a few minutes. I am sure that the same applies to members of the third Party in the House, that they would like to reflect for a few moments before responding.

I have just learned myself that it is a statement of immense importance to the country. I know that the Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. Mazankowski), the new Minister of Transport (Mr. Bouchard), and the new Minister of State for Transport (Mr. St. Germain) are reasonable men. At this time I would like to take the first opportunity to congratulate the new Minister of State for Transport for his new appointment.

Surely, either the House follows your good advice and suspends for a little while, or I will make a suggestion directly to the Deputy Prime Minister. My colleague asked to suspend until 12 o'clock, others have said this afternoon. Why do we not follow the very intelligent suggestion of the Speaker to temporarily suspend and do the entire "show" at 12.15 p.m in a row.

Personally, I would like to say to the Deputy Prime Minister that it is a good proposal, but I do not like it. It is a precedent. The British parliamentary system works by precedent. Why should we have a statement first? Give us some time for reflection and then we will come back. The press will already have the full statement of the Minister. Then while they are doing their very important work we will ask any critic if he or she has anything to say now, but it will not matter any more.

I like the manner in which we have always proceeded. The Minister makes a statement and it is immediately followed by the various critics, then the press, which has an important job to do in reporting, can report in total and not partially on what is taking place.

My suggestion to you, Sir, as the Speaker and the guardian of the rights of the minority in this House, is that you made a proposal; if need be, why do we not adjust your proposal to fit the suggestion of the Deputy House Leader, and forget the time until 12.15 p.m. and do the full "show" at 12.15.

Surely the Deputy Prime Minister wants to have an orderly House. I see an Hon. Member indicating no. I want to have an orderly House. I know that the Deputy Prime Minister wants to make an important statement, or whomever is responsible.

Surely it is not unreasonable to ask to postpone everything until 12.15.

Hon. Don Mazankowski (Deputy Prime Minister and President of the Privy Council): Mr. Speaker, I genuinely appreciate the words of my hon. friend who is a very distinguished Hon. Member of this House. I think that he also realizes and recognizes that when a statement is made it usually sets in motion a number of other activities and events so that it can be properly explained to the public at large.

I notice that Hon. Members were talking about 12 o'clock. The statement is before the respective Members now. Perhaps if I have a chance to explain it and elaborate as they follow through, it will be helpful to them in terms of responding. I submit that perhaps by the time I am finished it will in fact be 12 o'clock. With the very articulate and comprehensive explanation that I would provide to the House and the elaboration of some of the things contained in the statement, I think that Hon. Members will be much more enlightened and be able to respond more effectively.

As has been pointed out, as a Government we have made use of ministerial statements on many occasions. We believe that Parliament is where major and important statements should be made. There have been times when it has been absolutely impossible to get the notices to individual Members.

You and I, Mr. Speaker, have been around this House for a long time and have served in opposition. I can recall on many occasions that we were given an advance copy of a statement, or sometimes not even an advance copy of a statement, simply notice; perhaps at five or ten minutes to the hour, or during Question Period we would receive a copy of the statement and we would have to adjust our minds to responding to that statement.

Mr. Prud'homme: It was wrong then.

Mr. Mazankowski: Yes, it was wrong. In all deference to my hon. friend, the Hon. Member for Saint-Denis (Mr. Prud'homme), I think he would agree that we as a Government have tried to improve that situation.

I have to say to the Hon. Member opposite that the decision was only concluded by Cabinet this morning. It was impossible to give notice at a much earlier stage. I regret it very much. It is not my pattern, it is not my tradition, and it is not my custom. It is not our Government's tradition. I explained to the Hon. House Leader of the New Democratic Party, and I tried to explain to the hon. critic, my friend who represents his province so eloquently and the transport industry so well. I tried to make that explanation. I am not attempting to use the House of Commons in a callous fashion. I regret it very much, and I apologize to Hon. Members. I hope that with the fullness of time and the appropriateness of the statement that I am going to make they will understand and be in a position within 15 or 20 minutes to respond. I know that they will respond with vigour, conviction, and in a comprehensive manner.