

Request for Statement on NATO

elsewhere. Mr. Speaker, I cannot condemn strongly enough this cavalier treatment of parliament. We might as well all be home and listen to the Prime Minister announce his policies over the television screen, if this is the way he and his government are going to act.

● (2:10 p.m.)

We have had not only this review by the government and by agencies of the government but we have had a parliamentary committee which has met for months, which has taken evidence in Canada, which spent two weeks travelling through Europe, and which made a report. It so happens that I do not agree with the majority report, but the committee did make a report to this government. All these reviews inside and outside parliament have taken place and the Prime Minister is not yet ready to make that statement to the house. It may be that the division in the cabinet is so catastrophic that the Prime Minister, with all his intelligence and skill, is unable to solve the problem inside his cabinet. That is his blessed problem. There is no reason this parliament should be treated in this way. If the Prime Minister should make an announcement about the government's NATO policy tomorrow, as may well be the case, or on Friday or Saturday as will certainly be the case, then I say I do not believe the Prime Minister does not know the policy today. I say the only reason he is not making the statement today is that he has no respect for the House of Commons and for parliament and wishes to make the statement outside.

After all these discussions and all these meetings in and outside cabinet, no one can tell me that even this government has been unable to reach a decision on what its policy is, or that even this Prime Minister has been unable to heal the rift in his cabinet about which newspapermen have been writing. I believe that Canada's defence policy is of extreme importance to our country at the present time. Involved in it is not only the attitude of the government toward NATO, but also other areas such as NORAD, our policy in respect of foreign aid and all the other things that are involved in our foreign policy. After these months of promises and negotiations this parliament ought to hear it.

I hesitate, if I may use the expression with your permission, Mr. Speaker, to be a stinker—or let me put it more accurately, to be so much of a stinker that even I would recognize it; but if I were that way I would be very

[Mr. Lewis.]

much inclined to ask that the house defeat this motion, except that this is Wednesday and the day after tomorrow is Good Friday. Members of the house have a right to have time to get home to meet their families and the people in their constituencies. After all, I do not believe it would be sensible, fair or reasonable to oppose this motion.

However, I do rise to protest in the strongest possible language the Prime Minister's behaviour in refusing to let us have the government's policy on NATO at least after months and months of promises that this would be done prior to April 10 and if at all possible prior to the adjournment of the House for the Easter recess. There is no reason this should not have been possible, except for his cavalier attitude toward the House of Commons.

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, I think I can be very brief. I wish to assure the house and the hon. member who has described himself as a stinker, that my attitude is not one of being cavalier toward the House of Commons. If we had an announcement to make today on NATO policy obviously I would be prepared and delighted to make it today. The discussions we have been having on the NATO issue have been going on in various cabinet meetings. We could not make the decision after the weekend of March 15-16, which was the first date set for the weekend meetings of cabinet to review our whole policy, because the parliamentary committee did not bring in its report until I believe a week ago today. That is the reason the latest input into our study and review had to be taken into account; that is why we could not meet the early deadline we set for ourselves, but which we had not announced publicly.

We had hoped that within a week of our meeting on the 15th and 16th we would be able to announce our policy so as to be in time for the Easter adjournment. At the legitimate demand of the house we postponed these weekend meetings to accommodate the parliamentary committee, in order that we could study its report, which we did over this past weekend. Cabinet is in discussion now and has another meeting tomorrow. I hope after that meeting to be in a position to make an announcement. If the hon. member wants to stay around I will be delighted to have him present when I make the announcement. I have no particular desire to make this announcement exclusively for my friends in the press gallery; I would prefer to make it to