

Point of order

I know the option that the Government can use. The Minister can go out of the House and make the statement, and no one in the House can stop him from doing that. I realize and appreciate that. The Minister is trying to co-operate with us. We should be given copies of the documents and we should wait a few minutes. The Government should be reasonable with us. We will hear his statement and our responses will be made in a democratic way. We will have debate. That is what the House of Commons is all about. We do not want to have a debate on one subject and a response to it a half an hour or an hour later.

I see that the statement is being circulated now. I am very happy. Give us 20 minutes to read it and we will proceed. The House of Commons will not fall because of that.

Mr. Riis: Mr. Speaker, there is a serious problem before us. There is a resolution. We have just now been presented with the Minister's statement. It is a reasonably lengthy statement compared to most.

As the Deputy House Leader has indicated, we follow the tradition in a most appropriate way. I cannot recall, other than the odd exception, when a Minister has not given us more than adequate advance notice concerning a statement to be made.

May I suggest, since the Government has indicated that it is not prepared to provide us with a few moments to read the statement, and in view of the fact that it has only been circulated in one official language, which is a problem, and an understandable one, and I believe we now understand at least the nature of the statement and we recognize its importance, that at least a few moments be set aside. As a result I would move that this House do now adjourn.

Mr. Speaker: Just to recapitulate, the Hon. Member for Ottawa—Vanier (Mr. Gauthier) and the Hon. Member for Kamloops—Shuswap (Mr. Riis) have risen on the same point of order. We have continued on that same point of order.

Basically, members of the Opposition have been asking that they have some time to read a copy of the Minister's statement. I think the general consensus on the opposition side is that they would return within a reasonable period of time, perhaps by noon, when the Minister would give the statement and the Opposition would then reply.

First, let us consider the procedural law. It is quite clear that if the Minister wishes to go ahead, and while I have certainly remarked to the Hon. Member for Ottawa—Vanier that there is a long-standing tradition of giving notice to the Opposition, strictly speaking, he can go ahead at this time and make a statement.

The Hon. Member for Kamloops—Shuswap has proposed, in view of the fact that this discussion has gone back and forth and has not resulted in a complete agreement, to move that the House adjourn. I have to advise the Hon. Member that there are long-standing precedents that make it quite clear that such a motion to adjourn, which in ordinary circumstances is not

debatable, cannot be made on a point of order. I bring that to the attention of the Hon. Member.

I have a suggestion to make; that I adjourn statements by Ministers for the moment and carry on with routine proceedings. I suggest that both sides speak with each other, and it might be that by the time I have finished with routine proceedings they will have resolved this matter in an agreeable way.

Mr. Lewis: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate your comments and am naturally guided by your wisdom. However, I think the whole point of this is that this matter could have been handled strictly by discussion among the House Leaders, in the hypothetical, if in fact the Hon. Member for Winnipeg North (Mr. Orlikow) had not brought the matter to the floor of the House. I think that is a subject to which the Chair might wish to apply itself.

Mr. Tobin: When you give advance notice you always mention the subject matter. That is not a good argument.

Mr. Lewis: It is because notice is often given with the understanding that it is embargoed. As my hon. friend for Ottawa—Vanier has said, he has no official notice of what is the subject matter of the debate. Therefore we were able to deal with the hypothetical until, unfortunately, our colleague from Winnipeg spilled the beans, so to speak.

● (1130)

I would suggest to you, Mr. Speaker, in view of the importance of this statement that we should proceed to put it on the floor of the House immediately, and give the Opposition an opportunity to respond, at its timing. I am prepared to do that, whether the members of the Opposition want to do it earlier or later.

I wish to return to the original point. Yesterday we saw a request for an emergency debate in which technically the person who had asked for it was not present. We acquiesced and let my friend, the Hon. Member for Kamloops—Shuswap (Mr. Riis) go ahead and make his argument. You will appreciate, Mr. Speaker, that there is no opportunity to respond. We let that happen. We are now asking for the same spirit of co-operation; not motions to adjourn the House—

Ms. Mitchell: It is a very different issue.

Mr. Lewis: —in order that this important statement can be made on the floor of the House of Commons. It could obviously be made at a press conference and brought back here to be debated.

Ms. Mitchell: Admit it, you made a mistake.

Mr. Lewis: But we have done the honourable thing by bringing it to the floor of the House of Commons first. In view of the nature of the statement and its subject matter, I suggest that it would be appropriate for it proceed now, and during the