

Points of Order

members in the House are afforded no such appropriate nomenclature in the seating plan of this Parliament.

The Speaker: The hon. member will recognize that he has had every latitude. I have had indications that other members will want to participate in this point of order. I would ask the hon. member to wrap up now.

Mr. Blaikie: Mr. Speaker, I will wrap up. However, if I might be so bold as to say on my point of order, if I am being irrelevant or I am not speaking to the point, but I believe that I am—

The Speaker: Order. The Chair in no way indicates that the point of order is irrelevant. The Chair has heard a great many of the very relevant arguments the hon. member has put forward. The Chair at this point would ask again respectfully, that the hon. member come to a conclusion. Then we can have other views on this point of order.

Mr. Blaikie: Mr. Speaker, I will indeed come to a conclusion.

The weight of almost all the evidence in both law and convention therefore comes down in support of our claim to be recognized in this House as the party that we clearly are. The only precedent that breaks the pattern is the treatment of the Bloc in the last Parliament.

At this point I do not wish to open the question of whether a party that forms between elections as a result of defections from existing parties should enjoy the same status as a party of members who sought election under their party banner. I do not want to enter into that debate.

What I do want to argue is that your ruling on party status should be based on a clear reading of the law and on the overwhelming number of precedents in support of our claim to party status, not on a single problematic precedent that itself broke with all precedent.

I will say what we are asking for so that you are absolutely clear of what I am on my feet about.

We ask first that the seating arrangements be adjusted to seat us as a party with proper precedence given to our leader as a leader and as a Privy Councillor, and that the published seating plan identify us as New Democrats, as is already the case in *Hansard*.

We ask that we be treated as an opposition party during question period where at present we are recognized only very rarely, systematically denied supplementaries and always relegated to the last question.

I would point out that in the last Parliament the leader of the Bloc was regularly recognized at about two-thirds of the way through question period. I direct your attention to *Hansard* of 1993 for February 11 and 25, March 9 and 24 and May 4. Therefore, it is clear that the leader of the New Democratic Party has been treated in an unprecedented manner and that due

consideration should be given to changing the way our leader has been treated since the opening of this Parliament.

My final point, for guidance on this matter let us return to Mr. Jerome's ruling of November 6, 1979. He said regarding the rights of small parties: "Participation in question period is their right, the same as any group of five members. It is not difficult to calculate mathematically what five members are entitled to as a proportion of the membership of the other parties". *Hansard*, page 1009.

If we apply Mr. Jerome's arithmetic to the situation in this Parliament, NDP members comprise 8 per cent of the opposition members and are therefore entitled to roughly 8 per cent of the opposition questions. By my calculations in a typical week there are some 125 questions and supplementaries posed by opposition members of which we should be entitled to 10. In practice you typically recognize us for only two questions per week. Occasionally you have not recognized us at all, as in the week beginning April 11 and only once have you recognized us for as many as four questions.

We therefore ask that we get the number of questions due to a party of nine members, that our leader be recognized after the leader of the Reform Party, that we be allowed supplementaries, and that we not always be relegated to the last question.

• (1525)

Finally, we ask that in general we be treated as a party under the Standing Orders and that you work with our caucus officers in the customary ways to facilitate the operations of the House. My party colleagues and I are asking only that we not be discriminated against simply because we did not meet an arbitrary threshold of dubious relevance that has not even customarily been applied by previous Speakers to procedures in the House, against which there is ample parliamentary precedent for alternative approaches.

We have every confidence that you will see the merit in our case and we look forward to the results of your review of this question. We are not asking you to rule on this in a hurry, Mr. Speaker. However we certainly hope that by the time Parliament resumes its business in the fall after the summer recess that some changes will have been made along the lines which I have suggested in this point of order.

The Speaker: The point of order is indeed a very important one. That is one of the reasons the Chair gave every latitude to hear all of the arguments.

Are there other interventions? The hon. parliamentary secretary to the government House leader.

Mr. Peter Milliken (Parliamentary Secretary to Leader of the Government in the House of Commons): Mr. Speaker, I was impressed with the very able argument of the hon. member for Winnipeg Transcona on this important point.