

Points of Order

On February 18, 1966 for instance, Speaker Lamoureux allowed representatives of the Social Credit Party and the Ralliement Créditiste to respond to ministerial statements under what is now Standing Order 33(1), even though they had only five and nine members respectively. He argued that he did not see how the standing order concerning the right of opposition parties to respond to ministers' statements could be "interpreted in light of the amendment to the Parliament of Canada Act", *Hansard*, February 18, 1966, page 1435.

The force of the tradition of protecting the rights and status of small parties can be seen again in the treatment of the Social Credit Party after the 1974 election. With only 11 members the Social Credit Party once again fell below the legal threshold of 12 members required in order to receive financial benefits. The Board of Internal Economy nonetheless granted the Social Credit Party \$50,000 for research purposes at its meeting of October 22, 1974, a meeting attended by the present Prime Minister and by Mr. Mitchell Sharp.

I am raising this point not to ask for similar financial benefits, but to illustrate how previous Parliaments have protected the rights of small parties so assiduously that they sometimes have ignored the 12-member threshold on financial matters.

In 1979 in a Parliament in which I myself participated the Social Credit Party sent only five members to the House. A striking committee did not include a member from the Social Credit Party although they did sit in the front row of the House, right down in that corner.

There was a motion by the Social Credit member that his party should have a representative on the striking committee. In the ensuing debate on October 9, 1979, it was made clear by the Conservative government and Liberal opposition that what was at stake was not only the particular issue of the membership of the striking committee but also the party status of the Social Credit caucus.

When the Social Credit motion failed, Speaker Jerome at first decided that the motion obliged him not to grant the Social Credit members party status. On October 10 he did not recognize their leader in the debate on the speech from the throne. His ruling can be found on page 69 of *Hansard* for October 11, 1979.

The next month Mr. Speaker, your predecessor, Speaker Jerome, revised his position and took into account the important responsibility of the Chair to protect minorities in the House. In debate on an opposition no confidence motion on November 6, 1979, Speaker Jerome recognized the leader of the Social Credit in debate immediately after the other opposition party leaders. He gave an eloquent justification for his decision from which I would like to quote. It is an important piece of evidence because

it qualifies the original ruling of October 11 published in the edition of Speaker Jerome's rulings.

I quote: "We ought to be clear at the outset that it is not a transgression of propriety to mention the name of the political party of the members who are involved; it is the Social Credit Party of Canada. Its members are members of this House of Commons and their leader is the hon. member for Beauce. Those are the realities. The vote"—on the striking committee motion—"under no circumstances, may I say, can be taken to pass out of existence a political party, nor can it be taken to render as independent members the group which has been recognized as a party and which has in fact been seated together as a political party. The Social Credit Party exists as a political party and the five members exist as members of that party under their leader".

He went on to say that even though the House had expressed itself on the question of the membership of the striking committee, he had certain responsibilities as Speaker.

Again, I quote Speaker Jerome: "It seems to me that the responsibility of the Chair and the responsibility of the House of Commons is to protect whatever rights minorities do enjoy and therefore it seems to me that I must conclude what it is that the members of the Social Credit Party are entitled to—I think that what those members are entitled to respects the fact that they are members of a political party so long as it does not give them an advantage that they would not otherwise enjoy as five members and secondly so long as it does not deprive other members of their right to participate in some way". *Hansard*, November 6, 1979, pages 1008-9.

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This is the approach to the question of party status I am asking you to take toward myself and my colleagues in the New Democratic Party in the House. We are asking you to recognize us as a party in the House just as previous Speakers have recognized small parties in the past.

One result of previous Speakers' recognition of small parties can be seen in the seating plans of past Parliaments. I would like to table some of these past seating plans for your consideration. I submit these for your consideration because they show that parties with fewer than 12 members have indeed been designated as parties and seated as parties with representation on the front benches.

I draw your attention in particular to the seating plan dated April 1989 where even only one member, the member for Beaver River, was designated as a member of the Reform Party. As I mentioned earlier however, this designation of the member for Beaver River disappeared with the advent of the Bloc and the decision not to treat it as a party. Currently the nine NDP