

this House, I am ready to do it right now. And I would like to have my say on this fundamental issue: how do we know what constitutes a political party and what are the definitions contained in the Canada Elections Act and the Standing Orders of the House of Commons.

And since the hon. member for Shefford maintains that he is not a political party, Mr. Speaker, I am sorry to tell him that we cannot accommodate his request to reply to the Minister, but not because we are opposed to what he is going to say or to his freedom of speech. Even though freedom of speech is sacred in this House, we must follow the rules. Under the item of business called "routine proceedings", the Minister made a statement she had a right to make and to which we replied. In previous rulings, former Speakers, namely Mr. MacNaughton, Mr. Lamoureux and Mr. Jerome, have always maintained that independent members do not have the right to reply to Ministers' statements.

[English]

Mr. Nelson A. Riis (Kamloops): Mr. Speaker, first I want to say that we acknowledge and appreciate the fact that the minister made the statement on major changes to Canada's immigration policy in the House today, which permitted then an opportunity for recognized opposition parties to respond.

I share the concern my hon. friend from Shefford obviously has in wanting to respond. I know as a member from the western part of Canada where these changes will have a major impact on our communities, I too would like to respond. The rules limit me from doing so. I also acknowledge that there are other members who are independent members whom I am sure would similarly have views that they too would like to reflect on in terms of this major announcement.

As the hon. member for Ottawa—Vanier pointed out, Standing Order 33(1) makes it clear what we can do within the rules. The only alternative my hon. colleague would have would be to seek unanimous consent—we do that from time to time—to overlook the Standing Orders or to alter them in order to let a certain event to occur.

That is the only procedure I see available. Mr. Speaker, your hands are tied, and in a sense our individual hands are tied, but that would be the only way that the

hon. member for Shefford would have a chance of responding as would others, if they received unanimous consent of the House.

Mr. Speaker: I do not see other members rising. If they wish, I of course will hear them. I do not think I need to hear further on this point.

Mr. Peter Milliken (Kingston and the Islands): Mr. Speaker, I simply had some precedents that I thought might be of assistance to you in dealing with this issue from 1963, 1966 and 1979. I can summarize them briefly if it would be of any assistance to Your Honour.

If not, I am prepared to rely on the arguments advanced by my colleague from Ottawa—Vanier and the hon. member for Kamloops which I submit are correct and in accordance with these precedents.

Mr. Speaker: I want to thank the hon. member for Kingston and the Islands. I am very familiar with the precedents.

Mr. Albert Cooper (Parliamentary Secretary to Leader of the Government in the House of Commons): Mr. Speaker, I hesitate to interrupt because we do not want to be seen in any way as preventing the opposition from participating in an important issue.

I, too, have gone through the precedents fairly carefully, and it seems to me that the precedents are quite clear that even though a group within the House is not a recognized party according to the parliamentary act that we deal with, often in the past the Speaker has allowed those members to intervene and make statements.

I think that would be the case here today, except for one rather unique exception; that is, as was mentioned by the hon. member for Ottawa—Vanier, we are dealing with a group that has not been registered as a party electorally. I think that does have a significant impact on how it can be treated within the Chamber. Essentially, that is a very serious difficulty. The Speakers' precedents in the past have been very clear, that independents were not allowed the privilege of responding to ministerial statements because they did not represent a party. Even though we now have a group that think of themselves as a party, they are in fact not registered as one within the House or with the Electoral Act of Canada.