

Points of Order

● (1110)

Some hon. members: More, more.

Mr. Milliken: I could read more of the words of the hon. member for Lethbridge. However, it is clear that what he meant by "when is it going to stop" is, when is the government going to install the Reform Party as the opposition. The government did not support the Bloc as the official opposition. It was chosen as the official opposition because it was the largest opposition party and it still is the largest opposition party.

The Reform Party, despite its efforts, has been unsuccessful in winning any seats in any byelections. It is down in the polls to 10 per cent. Reform members have problems and they are trying by this grandstanding technique today, when they are still behind 53 to 52, as the hon. member for Roberval so ably pointed out, to say that Your Honour ought to make a decision to displace the official opposition in their favour.

What the chief government whip has said is very clear. You, Mr. Speaker, have the power to make the decision as to which party is recognized as the official opposition in the House. It is not for the government to make that decision and the government does not want to be a part of that decision.

We are prepared to say that if a situation arises in the next little while where there is an equality of votes, the standard practice in the House is to leave the status quo. We point that out. It is not, of course, intended to be binding on anybody, but it is the normal practice.

When the Speaker, for example, is confronted with a situation where there is a tie vote in the House and has to break the tie, he generally exercises his favour so as to maintain a status quo and not to pass a motion that would otherwise change the status quo by voting in favour of that motion. It is generally exercised in favour of maintaining the status quo.

That is the normal practice developed over some considerable time by Speakers of the House. While it is not necessarily binding, it certainly is a fairly well accepted convention and one that Your Honour will want to consider very carefully when making any decision. Perhaps your decision should not be made today but at a future date when there has been a resignation by the hon. member for Lac-Saint-Jean. He might not win the leadership of the Parti Québécois. If he came to his senses, of course, he would seek the leadership of the Liberal Party. However that is not vacant in Quebec. So far that has not happened. He has changed parties before, as hon. members opposite know.

Mr. Boudria: Five times.

Mr. Milliken: As the chief government whip says, five times.

The fact is that he is running for a particular position and he indicated very clearly that he was not going to leave his seat in

the House until he got it. Why give up certainty and trade it for something so uncertain? He is staying as a member of the House and that is the case now.

If that situation changes before the House resumes in February, I am sure that Your Honour will want to bear that in mind when looking at the facts and assessing the situation in making a ruling on this point of order.

With great respect, the point of order is premature. The hon. member for Lethbridge should really get a grip on the rambunctiousness of some of his members. I realize it is Christmastime, but all the presents do now flow in December. Some of them may come on another day.

This application is premature. He should have waited, as he said he would do when he spoke to the *Calgary Herald* in November, until he is in a position where the Reform Party is the larger party and then make his claim.

Mr. Ian McClelland (Edmonton Southwest, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, what is happening today is perhaps the most important consideration that will be faced by this Parliament. Make no mistake, Mr. Speaker, the point has been missed thus far in this debate. The fact is that our country is at peril, every bit as much as if we were facing an enemy from without. We have an enemy in our midst. We have given the Trojan horse in our Parliament the ability to subvert the actions of the House. The really important consideration is we are going into a life and death battle for the future of the country. The separatists, the Bloc, have a democratic right to be here. They have a democratic right to fight this on any battlefield they can get and to do so with passion.

● (1115)

We have the same right to use everything in our power, every resource we have, to fight them. For the last two years our fight has been one of retreat. Every opportunity the country has had to face the separatists, to stare them down, we have retreated. That is what damn near cost us the country on October 30.

The time to start facing down the separatists is now, in the very centre of the country, the House of Commons. They have no right to be the official opposition. They do not represent the continuation of the country as a whole and complete entity.

Mr. Ken Epp (Elk Island, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I do not now envy the load of responsibility you carry. The decision which is yours now to make is pivotal.

I add and emphasize the definition of the official opposition, which you must take into consideration, from section 196 of *Beauchesne*:

The political party which has the right to be called the "Official Opposition" is the largest minority group which is prepared, in the event of the resignation of the Government, to assume office.