

Routine Proceedings

• (1130)

Consequently, if the purpose of ministers' statements is to give advance notice to parliamentarians, out of respect for this House and what this institution represents, I am sure, Mr. Speaker, that the government and members of other parties in this House would be interested to hear the views of the various groups sitting in this Chamber. This goes to the very core of this institution and our democratic traditions.

For instance, as far as immigration is concerned, I am sure that the Quebec perspective is of particular interest to the hon. member for Ottawa—Vanier and the Minister of External Affairs, who has an abiding interest in Quebec issues. So I would like to be able to oblige by expressing my point of view.

Right Hon. Joe Clark (Secretary of State for External Affairs): Mr. Speaker, I am just as deeply interested in questions related to the interests of Quebec as I am in democratic issues. Democracy calls for respect for rules, Mr. Speaker, and the rules of the House are clear.

Mr. Jean-Robert Gauthier (Ottawa—Vanier): Mr. Speaker, I feel I must respond because the member for Shefford did refer to me personally. First I would remind him that the Standing Orders are quite clear when it comes to ministerial statements, that is who can respond and how.

Mr. Speaker, I fully agree that this morning's ministerial statement is important and that the parties in opposition to the government have the right to reply. I did say the parties in opposition to the government have the right to reply. The Standing Orders are quite clear on that point. For the benefit of hon. members, allow me to read Standing Order 33(1):

33.(1) On Statements by Ministers, as listed in Standing Order 30(3), a Minister of the Crown may make a short factual announcement or statement of government policy. A Member from each of the parties in opposition to the government—

I underscore the words "parties in opposition"—

—may comment briefly thereon. The time for such proceedings shall be limited as the Speaker deems fit.

The minister spoke for seven minutes and I think that the opposition parties, certainly the Official Opposition and the third party, the New Democratic Party, did keep to the allotted time.

This morning, Mr. Speaker, the member for Shefford wants to debate the matter. He is entitled to do that. The debate has been opened by the minister's statement and it will go on, I imagine, during Question Period and probably during comments and statements by members under Standing Order 31. He will have every opportunity to comment on the decision. I know him well enough to realize he will do that without hesitation.

He said something like "we are an important faction in this House". He did not say "we are a political party of the House", he said "we are an important faction in this House". That is what he said. Mr. Speaker, the Standing Orders do not say anything about factions having the right to respond to ministerial statements. The Standing Orders are clear, only duly recognized parties can do so. If the hon. members want, I could talk for several minutes or even several hours, read all the precedents since 1963 when the Standing Orders were changed, and even from the Parliament of Canada Act which gives a definition of party leader and determines who can be considered as such.

Mr. Speaker, in effect, what the hon. member for Shefford said is that, as an independent member of this House—it is his official status—, he would like to reply to the Minister. I am sorry but the Standing Orders do not allow him to do this. I agree with him that it is a very important issue. We are all concerned with—me as much as anybody else—the issue of linguistic duality. I certainly do not need a lecture from anybody on this. However, I, among others, would like to see the House function in a somewhat orderly fashion, which could be accomplished if the hon. members followed the rules as they are written.

If the rule in question is poorly written, I think it can be modified if a majority of members agree. But, in its current version, it clearly specifies that only the opposition parties have the right to reply. As far as I know, the group to which the hon. member for Shefford belongs is not recognized as a party in this House. Mr. Speaker, if we must start debating today what constitutes a party in