

*Points of Order**[English]*

## NEW DEMOCRATIC PARTY

**Mr. Bill Blaikie (Winnipeg Transcona):** Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order of which I have given notice to you and to the parties in the House.

It has to do with the fact that we in the New Democratic Party have not been recognized as a party in the House since the beginning of this Parliament. In doing so I am fully aware that certain decisions relating to our current lack of party status were taken before you were elected as Speaker.

• (1505)

I am therefore making these arguments with no intention whatsoever of pointing a finger at the Chair or at anyone else for that matter. The fact that we have been seated in the House as if we were independent members is a good example of what I mean. The seating plan took shape before you were elected as our Speaker, but it is only the most concrete symbol of the whole situation that I want to call into question today.

I have not raised this earlier because I thought it was appropriate for the House to become acquainted with itself after the unprecedented upheaval of the last election. This place operates not only on the basis of written rules but also on the authority of a large body of conventions which come from parliamentary practice. I thought it best to wait until the many new members had an opportunity to become familiar with the importance of conventions in the makeup of our day to day parliamentary constitution.

However, with respect to the issue I wish to raise today, the real conventions of this place and the conventional wisdom are not always the same. The recent conventional wisdom has been that the 12-member threshold for party status is a hard and fast rule understood in an unambiguous way by all concerned.

My point today is that the question of party status has in fact been governed by unwritten convention and practice and that the only thing that is hard and fast is the question of which parties qualify for certain moneys. I begin by making it absolutely clear that what I am seeking is not a change in those sections of the Parliament of Canada Act which pertain to money, but a recognition that that statute applies only to money and that all else is a matter of convention, practice and the discretion of the Speaker as the Chair seeks to fulfil its historic role as the protector of the House itself and the minorities therein.

There are no unambiguous definitions of parties in legislation, in the standing orders or in the procedural authorities, and yet parties are essential to the efficient operation of the House. Their officers, leaders, House leaders and whips try to facilitate what all of us do here as we discharge our public responsibilities.

Parties present themselves to the House as parties and are not created or disposed of by the House itself. Our membership in our respective parties is a matter between ourselves, our fellow caucus colleagues, our extraparliamentary organizations and ultimately our electors. We can leave our parties or be asked to leave our parties. We can create new parties, merge two parties into one, as did the Progressives and the Conservatives, or change the name of our parties as we in the New Democratic Party did.

The tradition of this place has been for the Speaker to accept the party affiliation that the parties and the members report to him or her. Yet since the beginning of this Parliament the Chair has not accepted the party affiliation that we in the New Democratic Party clearly possess.

The only possible precedent for this is the way in which the Bloc Quebecois was treated in the last Parliament. All other precedents, including the way the one Reform member was treated prior to the formation of the Bloc, points to the injustice and inappropriateness of the way the NDP is now being treated.

I would ask members to listen to my argument before they judge it. The authority for not treating us as a party has apparently been the Parliament of Canada Act which since 1963 has set out a threshold of 12 members for parties whose officers are granted special allowances and subsequently for parties whose members may sit on the Board of Internal Economy.

My point today is first to show that the wording of the Parliament of Canada Act does not empower or require the Chair to withhold recognition from parties with fewer than 12 members in spite of the conventional wisdom. Second, I am asking the Chair to follow the established practice of recognizing such parties in the House.

Let us then look at the wording in the Parliament of Canada Act. The words in section 62 read that the officers of "a party that has a recognized membership of 12 or more persons in the House" shall receive a variety of allowances. It does not say that a party must have 12 members to be a recognized party and clearly assumes that parties with fewer than 12 members are indeed parties.

In section 50 caucuses that do "not have a recognized membership of 12" are not entitled to have representatives on the Board of Internal Economy but are clearly to be construed as still being caucuses.

These clauses are worded in such a way that the question of other forms of recognition is at worst left open. At best the wording of the statute seems to imply that party as a concept is something independent of numbers and that 12 is the number of seats an already recognized party must have in order to qualify for money but not for recognition as such. Recognition of parties with fewer than 12 members is already implicit in the wording of the statute itself. If the Parliament of Canada Act says anything about official party status then it confirms rather than denies