

Points of Order

The fact remains that while the decision is yours—

Mr. Hart: Yesterday was his last day.

Mr. Thompson: Don't you remember hugging and kissing him?

Mr. Boudria: I go back to the point I raised a while ago. People who believe that democracy is at stake here and that their arguments be heard, seem to believe other people's arguments do not deserve the same democratic consideration. They will probably stop heckling sooner or later or their leader might come and order them to shut up.

I want to indicate to you, Mr. Speaker, that the decision is yours and only yours. It does not belong to members of the House, to be made either individually or collectively. A vote of opposition members or a vote of government members would subvert the democratic principles that the third party states it espouses this morning.

I had the opportunity to consult the *Canadian Parliamentary Guide* concerning what happened in the Alberta legislature because of the precedent quoted by the hon. member for Lethbridge. The argument was made that the two independent members, presumably joined together at the hip, should form the official opposition versus two people who held that designation at the time.

• (1105)

It is interesting to note that one of the two people asking for that was the present member for Lethbridge. He lost the argument and did not become the official opposition. Perhaps he forgot about that, but that is what occurred some 13 years ago.

Second, the legislative assembly of the province of New Brunswick was faced with the situation of an identical number of seats, not close parity of seats some years ago. It made a decision in that regard and I will refer to it in a minute.

The interesting point that was raised by the member of the third party, the hon. member for Lethbridge, was that there was some similarity to what has occurred in other regions of the country.

The Speaker, of course, will be making his decision in due time on this. However, the precedent that was invoked is inappropriate, inaccurate and does not even reflect what occurred.

In reference to the decision in 1994 in New Brunswick, the Speaker had to choose between two political parties having an identical number of seats. The decision of the Speaker was that when there are an identical number of seats, the rule of incumbency should apply.

Mr. Elwin Hermanson (Kindersley—Lloydminster, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I rise in response to the hon. government whip and as the House leader in the last year of this session.

I want to make it abundantly clear to the House—I know you know this, Mr. Speaker—that this is the first formal presentation my party has made regarding the issue of the official opposition. We have not formally requested the government to make a decision because we realize the government does not have the jurisdiction to determine who is the official opposition. We understand that is your prerogative, Mr. Speaker.

I reinforce what my House leader stated, that we give you that prerogative. Our House leader has suggested that there may be two ways that you might choose to deal with this issue.

We have not, at any time, asked the government to recognize us as the official opposition. We have responded to Canadians' concerns about who forms the official opposition in this House. That debate has at times occurred in the House but I want to clarify that this is the very first presentation by the Reform Party to this House and to yourself specifically regarding the matter of official opposition.

The only further comment I would make is that this is the correct timing. We understand this is a serious matter and want to give you adequate time over the Christmas and New Year's break and through January, if need be, to consider the argument that my House leader has brought forward, the precedents that he cited, not only from the Canadian parliamentary system but the British and Australian systems as well.

I also want to acknowledge that the government whip did recognize that my House leader has personal experience in this issue. The precedent he is using is to argue that the Speaker in Alberta made the right choice. He is bringing those arguments to you. Hopefully you would make the same choice in this case.

Mr. Peter Milliken (Parliamentary Secretary to Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened very carefully to the presentations of the hon. member for Kindersley—Lloydminster and the hon. member for Lethbridge.

With great respect, I disagree with the hon. member for Kindersley—Lloydminster when he says that there has been no formal presentation before. There was a request. It was summarized by the chief government whip in his remarks a few moments ago. I would like to read it to the hon. member to refresh his memory.

On October 31, 1995 the hon. member for Lethbridge put this question during question period. He said: "Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has catered to the separatists in the House. His government supports them as the official opposition. His government has elected them as committee chairmen and his government has changed the agenda of the House for the separatists. The separatists in the House have been granted special, preferential treatment. My question is for the Prime Minister. Why is this happening and when is it going to stop?"