

Seating Arrangements in Chamber

of the election of a parliament be recognized as a party before it has submitted itself to the electorate?

Having indicated this new development to the house with its suggestive consequences, may I end my statement by relying upon the house to give me the necessary guidance required for the due administration of my duties in view of the issues presented to me by the letters from the hon. members concerned, and which have required me to make this statement today.

For these reasons I am of the opinion that the interests of the house, of members and of all parties will best be served if the questions raised by the hon. members for La-pointe, Red Deer, Villeneuve and Winnipeg North Centre in the various letters addressed to me were referred at this time to the proper committee for consideration and report so as to bring about a solution thereto.

As Speaker, I shall carry out the orders of the house and apply such interpretations to the rules of the house as the house itself may require of me.

Mr. Stanley Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, if I may I should like to rise on a question of privilege. My point of privilege relates to an aspect of the matter covered by the statement you have just made to the house. I think I should say at this time that I believe the house will agree with me that we are all indebted to you for the very helpful statement you have made with respect to the situation which now confronts us in this House of Commons. I may say also that at the conclusion of my remarks I should like to indicate my agreement with the suggestion you have made; in fact, as a matter of privilege I will suggest a motion along the very lines of your statement.

First of all may I indicate why in my view I feel, on behalf of this group, the New Democratic party, that there is a question of privilege to be raised at this time. Following the election of June 18, 1962, when the Social Credit party and the New Democratic party both came to this house with certain numbers of members, the question of our seating and our priority arose in discussions between representatives of these parties and the then Speaker, Mr. Michener, and the subsequent Speaker, the present hon. member for Edmonton West (Mr. Lambert). It was my contention that on the basis of the precedents of former years, notably 1935 and 1940, seniority and certain other considerations entitled us in the New Democratic party to be recognized as the third party in the house. May I make it clear that we in this party accepted the judgment that was given by Mr. Speaker

Michener and by Mr. Speaker Lambert that other considerations had to be set aside in light of one overriding consideration, namely the number of members in each group. Therefore, because following the election of June 18, 1962, the Social Credit party had 30 members and we had only 19, the Social Credit party was recognized as third party in the house and we were given the position of fourth party in the house.

A few months later came the election of April 8, 1963. As a result of that election again the Social Credit party had more members than we had: they had 24 on the night of the election, which was reduced to 23 a little later. In any case our number, as hon. members know, was 17. The issue was raised again but there was no extended argument about it, because we were all agreed that the decision had been made the year before, namely that so far as the seating of, and other matters affecting, small parties were concerned the number of members was the key factor. The Social Credit party had more members than the New Democratic party had; therefore the Social Credit party was given third place.

Mr. Speaker, as you have indicated in your statement, I wrote you about this matter on behalf of this party on September 18, pointing out to you that reports in the press seemed to make it quite clear that we, with our 17 members, had become the third largest party in the house. In my letter, which I note you are prepared to table—I should be glad if all this correspondence were tabled—I did not happen to name the Social Credit party, but I referred to recent events and said that in the light of these events we were obviously the third party in size in this house, and I indicated that I expected that when the house met on September 30 we would be seated in third position next to the official opposition.

I might point out, Mr. Speaker, that on the two previous occasions to which I have referred—the occasions following the election of 1962 and following the election of 1963—the decision was made before the house met. When the house met we sat in the seats allotted to us. Therefore it was my view when I wrote my letter of September 18 that this decision should have been made before today, and that on coming into the house today we should have been placed in seats which would recognize our position as the third largest party in the house.

There is involved, so far as our position is concerned, not only the question of where we sit; because after all it is a privilege to sit anywhere in this house, whether in the front row or the back row, up at that end or down at this end; there is a question of the