

*Points of Order*

are from another party look to Reform to defend their interests. These Canadians surely do not look to a party whose *raison d'être* is the break up of the Canadian Confederation. I cannot understand and Canadians cannot understand how that concept could be supported in any way. It puts doubt on who should be the Leader of the Opposition and who should be the official opposition in this assembly.

• (1050)

Why does the Reform Party now bring the matter before Your Honour? Early in this Parliament the leader of the Bloc and his party asserted and made a commitment that they would defend the interests of all Canadians and fulfil the roles of the Leader of the Opposition and the official opposition.

We have to look at the record, and the record speaks for itself. Over the past two years it has become absolutely clear this commitment has not been fulfilled.

We did not believe the interest of the Canadian union would be served by bringing this issue before the House while the referendum campaign was being waged. Instead we proposed measures for change to Confederation in the midst of that campaign. We proposed positive, democratic measures in pursuit of peace, order and good government of Canada. A constructive opposition could not have done otherwise.

Now the leader of the Bloc has again indicated, as of yesterday, that it is his intention to leave the House. Regardless of whether or not the Bloc leader leaves and the seat is declared vacant, serious doubt exists about whether the Bloc Québécois should continue to be the official opposition in the Parliament of Canada and for the people of Canada at this time.

Your Honour, serious doubts have been cast. The time is ripe for the consideration of this issue. In fairness, we would also like to offer another approach in considering this matter, an approach in keeping with the spirit and the evolving traditions of our democratic system. There are precedents when doubt exists where members of the opposition have been allowed to select their leader. I draw attention to two such cases.

From 1918 to 1920 the U.K. leader of the opposition was the leader of the Liberal Party, which was the fourth party in the House of Commons. The government of the day was a coalition of the Tories and like minded members of the Liberal Party. The second party was the Sinn Fein and the third party was Labour. The official opposition went to the Liberal Party for two very important reasons.

First, on the basis of a compromise worked out by the Speaker, Labour agreed to support the leader of the Liberals becoming the leader of the opposition. It was on the basis of the Liberal leader's having support from the greatest number of opposition members that he became leader of the opposition.

Second, in the event that the coalition government broke up, the coalition Liberals would return to their party banner. Therefore it would be the Liberals who would be asked to attempt to form a government in the event of the coalition's failure. The Liberals had the largest and strongest claim to being government in waiting.

The second case is from the Australian Parliament's House of Representatives in October 1941. Of the coalition parties, the United Australian Party was the largest party in opposition. The decision on who should be the leader of the opposition was not left solely to the United Australian Party. Instead the UAP settled its own leadership.

The Speaker then presided over a joint meeting with the Country Party, which was the other opposition party in the House. The two groups elected the leader of the opposition. The leader of the Country Party was elected leader of the opposition and the results were announced in the Australian House of Representatives on the next day. This can be referenced in the *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates* of October 8, 1941, volume 168, pages 730 and 731.

• (1055)

In summary, we are facing a very serious crossroads and we ask Your Honour to consider what we have laid before you at this time. We have pointed out that there is serious doubt surrounding the status of official opposition and that is why I have brought the matter to your attention on behalf of my party.

Where there is doubt, Mr. Speaker, I am asking you at this time either to make a decision with regard to the doubt or to preside over an election where opposition members determine the Leader of the Opposition. We have pointed out that it is not simply the largest party in opposition that becomes the official opposition in all cases. There are exceptions and other ways of dealing with the matter. There are circumstances that warrant another party becoming the official opposition.

As I have stated at the outset, we in the Reform Party have a better claim than the Bloc Québécois to being a government in waiting. It is absolutely clear. I can see where there is no doubt with regard to that matter. There is no way that anyone could argue any differently.

We have also pointed out that the Reform Party represents the broadest range of interests, whereas the present official opposition represents a very narrow range of interests and objectives, not for all of the people of Canada but for themselves and in their own province of Quebec.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, Reform Party members and I ask you in the most responsible way to consider the deliberations that have been presented before you. We ask that you base your ruling on our submission and, if required, give us your ruling when the House reconvenes. We also ask that you consider any change in circumstance regarding the matter during the Christmas recess. If such changes take place that put you in a position where you can make a decision before the House reconvenes, we