

Points of Order

It has also been argued that the same rules should not apply to parties who did not field candidates during the election, as was the case with the Bloc at the time. One of the examples given by my colleague was the Ralliement des créditistes, a party formed in 1963. Need members be reminded that this party did not exist at the time of the election? Then, the party was known as the Social Credit Party and it was headed by Mr. Thompson. A split developed within the ranks and Mr. Caouette founded the Ralliement des créditistes, a party which had not formally existed at the time of the election, a situation similar to that of the Bloc. Yet, the government of the day recognized the Ralliement des créditistes precisely because it was a minority government. The situation was quite different when the Bloc came into being. However, the Ralliement was no more a party at the time of the election than the Bloc was.

Therefore, the precedent exists for granting official status to a new party, although it was not considered when the Bloc requested such status. However, with respect to my colleague's question concerning the seating arrangement in the House, I will concede that the Bloc members were allowed to sit next to one another, pursuant to an agreement between all independent members. As I recall, we had reached an agreement with the Reform member and the two independents, Mr. Kindy and Mr. Knowlan. If there is agreement among the independents, I see no reason why the NDP members cannot sit next to each other. Provided, of course, there is agreement.

As regards identification, I think the hon. member is right. The Bloc's name appeared in *Hansard* and during the televised debates. I do not know if it is the case now for the NDP, but it was for us. I think this could be done for them. We did not get that recognition at the beginning. We raised the issue in various more or less pleasant ways and, in the end, we succeeded in having the name of our party appear on TV and in *Hansard*. I think we could apply that decision to grant the same privilege, with respect to the number of questions per week.

● (1535)

I am rather surprised to hear that Lucien Bouchard, the leader of the Bloc, was allowed to ask many questions. In fact, the figures show that, on average, he asked one and a half question per week. Whether that question had a major impact is a totally different issue which has nothing to do with the number of questions itself but, rather, with their quality. Again, the figures show that, on average, Mr. Bouchard asked 1.5 question per week, which is about what the NDP is allowed. I might add that those questions are always the last ones of the day, at about two minutes before three o'clock. In this regard, also, there is no change, compared to what the Bloc experienced.

These are the comments I wanted to make to help you make a decision.

[English]

Mr. Elwin Hermanson (Kindersley—Lloydminster): Mr. Speaker, I will be reasonably brief.

I want to thank the hon. member for Winnipeg Transcona for giving notice of his point of order. I would like to make a few comments on it, though first of all I would like to quote from *Hansard* of November 27, 1990, when a similar point of order was being discussed. At that time Ian Waddell, the New Democratic Party member for Port Moody—Coquitlam, argued in the House with regard to the Bloc Quebecois saying:

It is not a party. It does not have 12 people. Those are the rules. They should stop whining. The House has been very liberal to them and I find it shocking when they get up and whine, bitch and complain.

With regard to participation in question period and in members' statements, the House has been very generous with independent members and the Chair has been very generous, considering that very likely the New Democratic caucus has the poorest attendance record in the House.

I would like to get to some of the arguments that the member made with regard to having official party status. In 1974 the Ralliement Cr ditiste brought 11 members to the House of Commons. Despite their having less than 12 members all privileges which come with party recognition were given to them except for the extra stipend given to the leaders of the parties, other than the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition, with at least 12 members.

In October 1979 Prime Minister Clark was in the process of setting up his new government. He put forward the names for composition of the striking committee and moved approval by the House. Initially one issue raised for decision by the House was whether the Ralliement Cr ditiste with six members should be represented on the striking committee. Mr. Clark moved approval of the committee with no Cr ditiste. Mr. Roy of the Cr ditiste put forward an amendment to the motion to include a Cr ditiste.

Mr. MacEachen, House leader for the Liberals, raised the following additional issues for consideration: first, whether the group would enjoy the status, particularly the leader of that group, equivalent in standing to that of the Leader of the Opposition, who was Mr. Trudeau, and the leader of the New Democratic Party; second, whether they would have full status of other parties in respect of the question period; and, third, whether they would have full status of other parties in respect of statements on motions in response to ministerial statements.

Additionally, Mr. Knowles, the House leader for the New Democratic Party, who is now a member at the table, reiterated some of the above arguments and added a fourth issue for consideration. He stated:

While it has come to be thought that 12 members were required for party status, we overstepped it when the party had only 11 members last time.