

Points of Order

I was also amazed because my recollection is that during the last election campaign, one of the pitches the New Democratic Party put to the Canadian public was that they should vote NDP in order that they could have 12 seats in Parliament and therefore be recognized as a party, because if they did not get those votes and did not get those seats then somehow Canada was going to suffer terribly.

Mr. Blaikie: It is.

Mr. Milliken: It is not. The hon. member says it is but of course it is not. It is doing better than it was. I think that is in large measure because there are fewer New Democrats in the House, but I do not want to get into that. It is irrelevant to the issue.

The fact is there are fewer members of the New Democratic Party here today. The hon. member has raised a point about the representation of the party in the House. Some of those points, Mr. Speaker, are ones you will want to consider when you review the arguments put forward by the hon. member for Winnipeg Transcona.

Many of the rulings he has mentioned are accurate citations. However, I think he has ignored, perhaps deliberately, some of the rulings of Mr. Speaker Fraser on this issue in the last eight or nine years. They have significantly altered the thinking in respect of the application of the Parliament of Canada Act to the Standing Orders of the House.

I refer Your Honour to the decisions of the Speakers under Standing Order 33, which as Your Honour recalls allows for ministers to make statements in the House on Statements by Ministers and for the opposition parties to respond to them. The question of who constitutes an opposition party for the purposes of Standing Order 33 has led to the use of the Parliament of Canada Act as the criteria for making that decision.

I note that when this very argument took place in the last Parliament the New Democratic Party fully supported the position taken at that time by the government, by the opposition and by the New Democratic Party as the third party. The position was that one required 12 seats in the House in order to have the right to make a reply to a statement under Statements by Ministers. That effectively excluded the Bloc Québécois at that time from participating under Standing Order 33.

I would feel much more sympathetic toward the position of the hon. member for Winnipeg Transcona had he and his colleagues taken a different position in the last Parliament, but of course they did not. They may have been wrong at the time; we all might have been wrong. I invite Your Honour in considering the matter to review the authorities at that time.

I also think it fair to bear in mind in looking at this that the hon. member says he is not asking for money. He is not asking

that the Parliament of Canada Act's financial provisions be applied to his party. I agree with him.

I recall when his colleague, the hon. member for Kamloops, shortly after the election said he was going to put a pitch for money in the House there was a howl of outrage from the Canadian populace. The hon. member for Sherbrooke made the same kind of suggestion, that he should have money for his party and the outrage in the Canadian public was palpable. I received many letters on the subject expressing extreme disagreement with the thought of giving money to these other parties when they had been properly thrashed by the electorate for the poor service they had rendered Canadians in the previous Parliament.

• (1530)

I sympathize with Canadians in their judgment. I agreed with Canadians in their judgment and I, for one, was not prepared to give that additional money. Therefore I am pleased that he has not done that today.

On the other hand, he has raised some points that the Chair ought to consider. They are ones, considering the equities of the situation, that ought to be reviewed very carefully. I invite the Chair to take into consideration everything that the hon. member for Winnipeg Transcona said and render a decision to the House that will be fair and equitable as between all the members, based on his submission.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie): Mr. Speaker, a request similar to this one was made at the beginning of the session by the member for Sherbrooke, on behalf of himself and his colleague, therefore on behalf of the entire caucus of the former Conservative Party. At the time, the Speaker refused to recognize the Conservative Party.

Therefore, this subject has been debated. At the time, I pointed out that the arguments raised by the Conservatives, and again today by the NDP, were raised three years ago by the Bloc Québécois. The Speaker of the day had ruled that these arguments were not valid enough to formally recognize the Bloc. We have since come to agree with the Speaker's ruling. I have considered all the arguments put forward by my colleague and I believe that the rule of 12 continues to apply, except under certain circumstances.

Most of these circumstances arise when there is a minority government in the House. Such was the case in 1979, 1963 and 1957 when the parties agreed to recognize a party without 12 members. For reasons that are fairly obvious, the Clark government may have needed the support of the Ralliement créditiste. Moreover, we saw what happened when they later withdrew their support. Therefore, in some specific instances, primarily when there is a minority government, official status will be granted to a party that does not have the required number of sitting members.