

*Speaker's Ruling*

If the hon. member's argument persuades his colleagues to the solutions he seeks, then the House will have to give new guidance to the Chair.

[English]

As your Speaker and the guardian of the rights of minorities and each individual member, I remain fully aware of the grave responsibilities of the Chair in this regard. Indeed, an analysis of the last two months shows that a member not belonging to a recognized party has participated almost every day during the period reserved for members' statements and, on the average, every other day during question period. The House may be assured that I and my deputies pledge to continue to do everything we can to facilitate the fair and active participation of each member in the work of the House.

In my view unilateral action by the Chair would mark a significant departure from the interpretation of our rules and practices as they have evolved over the last decade. As your Speaker and the servant of the House, I believe that I cannot arbitrarily impose a new interpretation but must wait until the House as it is now constituted indicates to me what, if any, action it wishes the Chair to take.

Let me now address the two other matters: the designation of members as members of the New Democratic Party and their wish to be seated together.

The hon. member for Winnipeg Transcona complained that his party is not designated, as it should be, as a caucus on the seating plan of the Chamber. He presented copies of seating plans from previous parliaments to support his view. He did, however, acknowledge that his party is clearly designated as the New Democratic Party in the *Debates*.

[Translation]

Let us review the current situation. The Members of Parliament belonging to the New Democratic Party are identified as such in the *Debates* and on the televised proceedings of the House. They are designated as "others" in the back row to the left of the Speaker on the seating plan of the Chamber.

Seating arrangements in the House have traditionally been decided following negotiations among the recognized parties.

The chief government whip places members of the government in seats to the right of the Chair and, when there is not enough room on the right to accommodate all government members, some may also be placed to the left of the Chair.

Of the remaining places, the Whip of the Official Opposition assigns seats to the members of that party and the whip of the third party then assigns seats to members of that party. The responsibility for assigning to other members the seats that remain vacant has traditionally fallen to the Speaker.

To determine the seating arrangements for those members who do not belong to a recognized party, the Chair follows the order of their seniority as elected members.

[English]

In considering the NDP's request, the New Democrats' request that they be seated together and that their leader be granted the rank due her as a Privy Councillor, I was struck by a phrase of the hon. member for Winnipeg Transcona. Explaining the timing of his point of order he stated:

I thought it was appropriate for the House to become acquainted with itself after the unprecedented upheaval of the last election.

I applaud the wisdom of that comment. The Chair has made every effort to accommodate members fairly in the present situation. Having now been your Speaker for some five months, I have received various representations from members of Parliament and their constituents on this matter and I have carefully reviewed the precedents. For example, on September 24, 1990, at page 13216 of the *Debates*, Speaker Fraser noted on a ruling dealing with seating arrangements that the Speaker can exercise some discretion in these matters. He stated:

I also think members should understand that as your Speaker, I have some discretion in dealing with the rights of every person in this House who is in a minority position. I think we have a great tradition of protecting the rights of minorities, and I can assure the hon. member that the rights of minorities will be protected by the Speaker in a way that is fair and equitable for all other members.

• (1535)

Having concluded that some remedy does lie within the purview of the Speaker, I have therefore asked my officials to modify the seating plan as of the return of the House on September 19 to implement the following changes in the seats that the Speaker assigns:

(1) The hon. members for Sherbrooke and Saint John will be seated together and identified as the Progressive Conservative caucus on the seating plan.

(2) The hon. members of the New Democratic caucus will also be seated together and be identified as such on the plan.

(3) The hon. member for Beauce will be identified as Independent and the hon. member for Markham—Whitchurch—Stouffville will be identified as Independent Liberal.

[Translation]

This appears to the Chair to be a fair response to competing claims. Members of the same party will be identified and seated together, with the precedence of their respective leaders determining their place in the sequence. The two other members will be assigned the two remaining seats according to their seniority and designated according to their express wishes.