

Speaker's Ruling

chief government Whip, the Whip of the Official Opposition, and the hon. member for Lachine—Lac-Saint-Louis.

[*Translation*]

The Board considered the request made by the hon. member for Shefford that additional funds be made available to his group for research and for the office of the leader of the group. The Board decided not to make an exception in this case and not to make additional funds available at this time. The Board could have decided differently. For the moment, the decision stands and I can only reaffirm it.

[*English*]

That being said, however, it is important to note that the decision does not mean that the members in this group are impeded from full participation in the work of the House or that they are being deprived of support necessary to represent their constituencies adequately. The hon. member for Shefford argues that the nine independent members for whom he speaks require additional resources. Each member of this House receives a global budget which covers basic staff salaries, normal operating expenses of a constituency office, and related travel expenses. It is important to note that each of these members, like every other member of the House, enjoys the full flexibility to assign these financial resources as he sees fit. For example, under their global allocation, most members of the House will employ up to five staff persons to whom they assign research or administrative duties either in Ottawa or in the constituency, as they judge appropriate. The global budgets of these nine members taken together total close to \$1.5 million.

• (1510)

In addition to the global budget, the House provides each member with a fully funded Ottawa office and coverage of important ancillary costs like telephone, postage, printing and travel. Such then is the level of support that the House of Commons offers to each and every individual duly elected to serve as a member of Parliament. It is in this context that the case of the hon. member for Shefford should be viewed.

[*Translation*]

One can well understand the reasons the hon. member for Shefford may have for pressing the Board of Internal

Economy to recognize himself and his colleagues as an entity and to grant them additional funds accordingly. To date, these efforts have proven unsuccessful, but it is a long and dangerous leap to conclude from there that the basic rights and privileges of those members are somehow being abrogated.

A search of the *Debates* will show, on the contrary, that the hon. member for Shefford and his colleagues have been extended every courtesy by this House and that the Chair has safeguarded their participation in ways that are fully in keeping with our procedure and practices.

In Question Period the group was recognized for questions immediately on the return of the House in September and have since been recognized most days when they sought to question the government or to make statements pursuant to S.O.31.

[*English*]

These brief remarks have sought to explain to all hon. members and to the public who are watching the House of Commons funding of an infrastructure supporting the hon. member for Shefford and his colleagues. I trust that they will dispel any incorrect perceptions about the situation, and clarify that the support and funding available to every private member of whatever political persuasion is fully available to members who have identified themselves as the Bloc Québécois.

[*Translation*]

There are profound differences of opinion as to the best solution to the political and constitutional dilemmas we now face. The depth of the conviction with which these opinions are held and the very complexity of the issues before us make for a highly volatile situation. The Chair pledges to do its utmost to continue to serve this House in as even-handed and impartial a manner as possible. Meanwhile I ask for the continued co-operation of all hon. members so that, however vigorous and hard-fought our political battles, the work of this place will reflect the seriousness and the civility our constituents have a right to expect.

[*English*]

I have another ruling.

The hon. member on a point of order.