

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Wednesday, March 15, 1967

The house met at 2.30 p.m.

PRIVILEGE

RULING BY MR. SPEAKER ON PROPOSED
MOTION BY MEMBER FOR EDMONTON WEST

Mr. Speaker: Yesterday the hon. member for Edmonton West raised as a question of privilege what he termed a gross irregularity in the presentation of National Defence spending estimates for the coming fiscal year. He argued that the form of these estimates is in violation of the National Defence Act and the Financial Administration Act. The hon. member gave notice of a motion to have the book of estimates withdrawn and revised by the government.

Arguments were advanced by the right hon. Leader of the Opposition and by other hon. members in support of the claim that the estimates as presented are irregular in form and illegal, and that they affect parliamentary privileges.

The minister in reply argued that his departmental estimates were submitted on the basis of the approved integrated commands of the armed services. The hon. members for Medicine Hat and Greenwood also argued that there was no valid objection at this point to the form of these estimates and, therefore, no question of privilege.

Essentially the question submitted to the Chair is whether the proposed estimates of the Department of National Defence are presented in such a form as to be contrary to existing law. Some hon. members claim that the presentation is irregular, others argue that it is legal. The point is of course of great interest to parliament, and the concern expressed in the form of the proposed motion may be quite justified. What the Chair has to determine is whether the debate should come before the house at this time, in priority to other business, by way of a question of privilege. Certainly it is not for the Chair to decide whether these estimates are presented in a form that is contrary to the existing law. According to the usages of parliament the Speaker does not rule on a question of law.

In my view the proposition advanced by the hon. member for Edmonton West does not meet the requirements of a *prima facie* question of privilege. It is really an argument, no doubt serious, that can be brought forward by way of objection to the adoption of these estimates. It is undoubtedly a relevant point of debate when a supply motion is before the house for consideration. But in my humble opinion it is not a question of privilege, and therefore I cannot accept the motion proposed by the hon. member for Edmonton West.

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

Second report of special joint committee on the national and royal anthems—Mr. Ryan.

Ninth report of standing committee on justice and legal affairs—Mr. Cameron (High Park).

[Note: Text of the foregoing reports appear in today's Votes and Proceedings.]

WATER RESOURCES

TABLING OF REPORT OF ENGINEERING BOARD
ON OTTAWA RIVER

Hon. Jean-Luc Pepin (Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources): Mr. Speaker, I wish to table two copies in English and in French of the report of the Ottawa river engineering board, entitled "Report on hydrology and regulation of the Ottawa river".

This board was appointed in 1962 by the governments of Canada, Ontario and Quebec to investigate the hydrology of the Ottawa river basin and the existing regulation of its waters. It was to establish procedures which would make available accurate and timely hydrologic data and to determine whether improvements in regulation were possible.

The board investigated the existing regulation on the basis of monthly mean flow data and found that this has been generally satisfactory and has been efficient in the production of power. The board considers that the co-operative arrangement which has been in effect among users constitutes a satisfactory method for determining regulated flows.

The board recommends that a committee of pertinent agencies be established to advise