

this government, feel that it is proper to give courtesy to the press but not to members of this House.

**Some hon. Members:** Oh, oh!

**Mr. Stevens:** I found it ludicrous that when I asked to see someone senior to Mr. Simoneau, I was confronted by two other members of the Treasury Board, namely, Mr. David McEachran and Mr. E. R. Stimpson, who informed me that it was true, that the minister had specifically stated no one was to be admitted other than members of the press. I asked whether I would be admitted if, prior to three o'clock, I qualified as a member of the press. Mr. McEachran's answer was "yes, you may be accredited to the press. If you are, we will admit you as another press member", and he said I could quote him in the House.

That answer struck me as being absolutely ludicrous. It is government gone mad, on the one hand, to say to a member of this House that he has no rights and not to extend to him the courtesy of letting him see what the press already has access to, and, on the other hand, to say to a member that if he becomes an accredited member of the press quickly, he will be admitted.

I almost did get accredited as a member of the press. Someone overheard what had been said and offered to take me on staff if that would help. He said he would be very interested in seeing the same courtesy extended to me as that given to the press, namely, a preview of the estimates to be tabled.

Although I was able to get on the technical staff of the press, unfortunately, the Press Gallery has its own bureaucracy, and I could not be cleared for membership in the Press Gallery prior to three o'clock.

**Some hon. Members:** Oh, oh!

**Mr. Stevens:** But here I am, elected as a Member of Parliament for the riding of York-Peel, elected to represent, as I understand it, not only the people of York-Peel but generally the people of Canada, and I am told that if I could have cleared my membership in the press gallery quickly, I could have seen the estimates. But as a representative of the people of Canada, there is no way that this President of the Treasury Board would let me have access.

We are not naive. We know the real reason why members on this side of the House are not being permitted to see the estimates. In the estimates a spending program of approximately \$70 billion is anticipated, a much higher figure than was ever anticipated. In no way does the government want to meet embarrassing comments which might be raised by hon. members on this side of the House, which, incidentally, might be heard by those same members of the press, and perhaps even reported. What we are witnessing here is, first, contempt of Parliament, and second, something which in no uncertain way is interfering with our activities as Members of Parliament. We should not tolerate two standards with respect to courtesy extended on Parliament Hill. If it is a matter of courtesy to allow the press a preview, it should at least be a

*Privilege—Mr. Huntington*

matter of courtesy to allow all members of this House, to see the estimates prior to their being tabled in the House.

The president said there was no lock-up before the tabling of the 1979 Estimates when I was president of the treasury board. Of course, the President of the Treasury Board was a mere backbencher in the opposition ranks at that time. Perhaps he fails to realize that the critic of his party, a former president of the treasury board, did discuss the matter with me. He said, "In view of the fact that they are my estimates you will be tabling, there is no need to give me a preview of what I have already seen." That has no relevance to the situation today. The situation today is a clear question of privilege, and I hope, Madam Speaker, on behalf of my colleague you will find a prima facie case.

● (1530)

**Hon. Perrin Beatty (Wellington-Dufferin-Simcoe):** Madam Speaker, I will be quite brief. As a former minister of state for Treasury Board, I rise in support of my colleague, the hon. member for Capilano (Mr. Huntington). I am very much concerned about the fact that the President of the Treasury Board (Mr. Johnston) should make a conscious decision to exclude Members of Parliament from an information briefing which is being made available to the press gallery.

I want to make it very clear to the President of the Treasury Board that members on this side of the House are not in the least opposed to a lock-up at which members of the Press Gallery can be present. We believe it is essential that members of the press, who are charged with the responsibility of reporting on the estimates and other important announcements being made by the government, have full and complete access to government information. However, if it is essential that members of the press have access to this information to do their job of reporting to Canadians what is being done by government, surely it is even more important that Members of Parliament on all sides of the House be entitled to the same information. They should be entitled to receiving the same briefings and have the opportunity to raise questions and get information from the government as to its activities.

The minister says it is not a question of privilege but a question of courtesy. It is a matter of discourtesy. The President of the Treasury Board made a conscious decision today and gave orders that Members of Parliament should be excluded from that lock-up. That is what the officials said to my colleague from York-Peel (Mr. Stevens).

The minister says there are no precedents, it has not been done before. If the minister looked as far back as the budget produced by the Minister of Finance (Mr. MacEachen), he would recognize that there is a long-standing tradition in this House of Commons of an advance lock-up, that members of Parliament, and research staff in some instances, should be allowed in to get advance information about the government's plans so that when the information is released, they will be able to comment in an informed way about what the government is doing. This is the essential question on the issue.