

matter of ongoing practice. Therefore, the estimates could be introduced to the House at any time. It would be very difficult to present a case that a person who is not connected with the House of Commons, having information of what is contained in the estimates hours or moments in advance of its introduction, could make a substantial profit.

The second point is one which concerns me greatly, and that is the current method used in protecting the secrecy of the budget and the estimates. The lock-up process that we currently have in place is fundamentally flawed and inadequate. I want to suggest to the ministers through you, Madam Speaker, that if they decide to use the lock-up process and give advance confidential information to the press or to Members of Parliament, they must guarantee that these individuals remain in the lock-up until the minister rises.

An hon. Member: Right on.

Mr. Deans: That is the practice which is followed in other jurisdictions, and that is the tradition followed in the Mother of Parliaments. Therefore, I suggest that the practice we follow—I, myself, have been involved in adjuring the most recent budget—of inviting both members of the press and members of the opposition to a pre-budget briefing, and then to allow any or all of them to leave before the minister rises to begin the delivery, is a flaw in the system. If the minister believes—and he may or may not do so—and if you, Madam Speaker, believe—and you, of course, will tell us shortly—that the estimate papers are confidential until such time as the minister rises, then the entire process is wrong, and the minister must then accept the responsibility for the fact that the press were permitted to leave the lock-up in advance of his tabling the documents.

However, if you come to the conclusion that the budget is somewhat different from the estimates and that there is no opportunity for individuals to profit from advance knowledge, then the minister—though his action is perhaps unacceptable to members of the opposition, and maybe even members of his own party, in terms of sharing government information in advance, of making it public to the general public—if you were to decide that that is the case, then I can only say that you must rule that there is no actual breach of privilege.

The information that government decides to give to the opposition, and the way in which it is given, is frequently inadequate. The member who just spoke, the former minister of finance, the member for St. John's East—

An hon. Member: West.

Mr. Deans: St. John's West (Mr. Crosbie), thank you—is expressing a frustration that many people feel: that ministers do not treat the House of Commons with the respect which it deserves.

I think that in your deliberations, Madam Speaker, you might give some thought to whether or not there are occasions when ministers should bring their statements to the House in advance of holding press conferences, because not doing so

adds to the level of frustration and acrimony in the House of Commons. God knows, we do not need any more than we have. It makes the opposition suspicious of the government's motives, and it creates a sense of ill-will which does this country no good.

We are discussing more than a question about the procedure used by the minister. I am annoyed by it, and I think it is inappropriate. It would have been better to have had a proper lock-up with members of the opposition and members of the press present. That would have been the prudent and sensible thing to do.

If a lock-up is necessary, I think that it should extend to the point where the minister rises to table the documents. If that had been the case, this debate would never have occurred.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

An hon. Member: He is just incompetent.

Mr. Deans: In the interest of not compounding the matter further, I think that we should stop the debate and let the minister table the documents so that we do not make an even greater mess of an already unacceptable situation.

Madam Speaker: I am going to inform the hon. members now that I feel that this consideration of the question of privilege has taken quite a lot of time; but that is not the point. The point is that I feel that I am sufficiently informed. The arguments are becoming repetitive, which is an indication to me that most of the points have probably been made. I quite understood the points made by five hon. members from the Conservative Party, one hon. member from the NDP, and in the three brief interventions from the other side. That is a sufficient number of speeches, not all of which were short, and I do feel that I have been sufficiently informed. I will take this matter under advisement and consider all of the arguments that the hon. members have submitted.

MR. BLENKARN—DENIAL OF ACCESS TO PRESS LOCK-UP BY
DEPARTMENTAL OFFICIALS

Mr. Don Blenkarn (Mississauga South): Madam Speaker, earlier today I advised you of a matter which I thought was a question of privilege, and it was in connection with the use of the Houses of Parliament.

Yesterday, I attended at room 200 at eleven o'clock in the morning. Mr. Sproat and Mr. Hardie—who I understand are employees of the Treasury Board, and not employees of the House of Commons—barred my access to a room in this House of Commons. I was then accosted by Mr. Radborn—another employee of the minister of the Treasury Board and not an employee of the House of Commons, who phoned Mr. R. L. Richardson—who is apparently a deputy secretary of the Treasury Board, who then again denied me access to part of the House of Commons.

Madam Speaker, you are in charge of the House of Commons on behalf of Members of Parliament, and clearly you can assign to a Member of Parliament—whether or not that