

*Alleged Leak re New Airport Site*

on Friday a question of privilege was raised and I thought it would be useful at this time to give some of the background in respect to the alleged question of privilege.

The final decision on the site of the new Montreal International Airport was based on exhaustive technical studies made over a two and a half year period, consultation with other levels of government and other federal departments since August, 1968, and review of the many presentations from numerous local interest groups. In July, 1968, the decision was taken that a new international airport was required. The Government of Canada decided at that time that the government of the province of Quebec should be consulted in aiding in the final determination of the site for the new airport. This consultation took the form of two inter-governmental committees: From August, 1968, until December, 1968, a federal-provincial technical committee involving the federal government and four departments of the province of Quebec; and from December, 1968, until February, 1969, a federal, provincial and municipal committee involving my department and that of my colleague, the Minister of Forestry and Rural Development (Mr. Marchand), four departments of the province of Quebec and the Planning Department of the City of Montreal.

These committees discussed, reviewed and evaluated the possible sites that had been identified during the technical studies from December, 1966, to April 1968. These evaluations were made on the basis of the pertinent criteria which included the following:

1. Air space safety—separation from other important airports, meteorological conditions, obstacles.
2. Information in relation to urbanized areas.
3. Accessibility to the users.
4. Accessibility to Dorval.
5. Transportation network required.
6. Economic potential of airport at the respective sites.
7. Promotion of the economic development of other regions.
8. Cost benefit ratios.

During this process the government of Quebec made known its preferences to the federal government. The discussions with the province continued up until the last moment prior to the final decision by the cabinet. In fact a meeting with Dr. Lussier, Minister of Municipal Affairs of the province of Quebec, for a final review of the several sites was

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contemplated to be held as late as Thursday morning before the decision was taken. The decision of the federal government was forwarded to the province in a letter from the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) to Premier Bertrand just prior to the public announcement of the site.

It is obvious from the numerous levels of government involved and people within each level of government that this process, which is the only process which could lead to a fair and objective decision, resulted in many people being aware of the exact location of the more favourable sites. Every possible precaution was taken by all those involved that ensured that no one individual in any other level of government or agency knew the final cabinet decision before the decision was stated in the house.

In such a situation involving numerous levels of government with differing specific interests, and where such decision must be based on the technical criteria, it is unlikely that every participating party will be completely satisfied. The federal government recognized that if there were five sites that received intensive examination, four regions would be disappointed following the selection of one of the sites.

It was clearly important when the government announced the choice of the site, that there should be a complete factual briefing for the Canadian people and particularly for the residents of Quebec. Because our decision took into account very important technical considerations the cabinet decided on December 13, that certain advance preparation of material including video taping should be undertaken on a contingency basis.

Because the government does not have available complete facilities within the government service to carry out the necessary preparations, it was necessary to engage a private public relations firm, Agence Canadienne de Publicité Limitée, and to have them make arrangements with a local TV station for advance video recording and video taping. These private firms who collaborated with the government understood that no final decision had been taken by cabinet but that their participation in these advance contingency preparations was subject to the normal discretion and security which is involved in any professional contract. Moreover, as the house is probably aware, the Official Secrets Act has general application in cases of this kind.