

Inquiries of the Ministry

the fact that if they are interested in having the assistance of a summary statement in this respect, copies will be available at my office in English and French.

Mr. Pearson: Thank you very much.

Mr. Fleming (Eglinton): They are available there. Hon. members opposite seem to think they should have had advance information on this subject and be given advance copies.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to assure you that the Leader of the Opposition received a copy of these estimates just as soon as the Prime Minister did. I brought into this house this afternoon all the copies I could carry. I brought in the usual six copies of estimates. Whether they be main estimates or supplementary estimates, that is the practice. When you receive the message of His Excellency and read it, it is then that the six copies are distributed. One goes to the Prime Minister, one to the Leader of the Opposition, one to the leader of the C.C.F., two to the table and I am permitted to have one. Then copies are immediately available at the distribution office.

You may be aware, Mr. Speaker—and if you are not, I can tell you right now—that when the hon. member for Kenora-Rainy River rose to ask his question about amounts, asking me about something that was in the estimates, a copy of the estimates was already in the possession of the Leader of the Opposition just three seats from him. If there is any liaison at all between them, he had that information right at his elbow.

Mr. Benidickson: Mr. Speaker, on the matter of privilege may I make a remark or two. Everybody recognized the events this afternoon, but I want to draw attention to the fact that on a similar occasion last year the Minister of Finance took some pride in indicating to the house that he had advised the financial critic of the opposition, which he thought was a courtesy, that on a certain day, that day, he was going to present the estimates to the House of Commons.

I ask the Minister of Finance, did he do that this day when he claims he has been so generous in his treatment of his colleagues in this respect? I think it was observed by all members of the house that this particularly long document was received by me, not through courtesy of the Minister of Finance, at 2.30 or any other hour, but only by reason of the fact that I knew that perhaps at 2.30 it became a public document, and I took my own pains to obtain it.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Benidickson: But it is a document of intricate detail which I personally had to obtain. I do not want to put the hon. member

for Greenwood (Mr. Macdonnell) on the spot, but I would certainly assert that, knowing the predecessors of the present Minister of Finance, these difficulties would not have arisen if anybody had asked, as I asked at 2.30 sharp of the Minister of Finance in this house before you opened the proceedings, if he could have a document such as I obtained subsequently from friends outside the house—

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Benidickson:—a public document, after 2.30, from friends outside the house. May I make it clear that none of those friends were employees of the government of Canada. They were members of the press. It is now three o'clock in the afternoon.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Does the hon. member for Ottawa West, who raised the point, wish to say anything further before I rule on it?

Mr. McIlraith: Mr. Speaker, I want to make it clear that the part of the remarks of the Minister of Finance having to do with the press have no relevance to the point raised by me. The point I was raising was that the document was not made available to members of the House of Commons who would be expected to deal with related matters in the budget debate later today. He confirmed that in a later statement, when he said that if we would go to his office he would now, as minister, make available to us copies of the document.

An hon. Member: That is not what he said.

Mr. Pearson: That is what he said.

Mr. McIlraith: I understood the minister to say he was making it available to any member who went to his office. That is my understanding of his remarks.

Mr. Benidickson: "Come and beg for it".

Mr. McIlraith: I think he would be quick enough to correct me if I am wrong about that. My point of privilege is this. I know the Minister of National Defence is not understanding this, but perhaps I may continue to state it. The point is this, that it is not the obligation of any member of the House of Commons to have to go as a puppet to any minister of the crown to obtain public information that should be of record. The document should have been available.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. member for Ottawa West has raised as a matter of privilege an alleged breach arising out of facts which are