

documents and proper time for, deliberation and study of them.

I might point out that the volume I have in my hand is the form of the main estimates for March 31, 1981, and the estimates ending March 31, 1982, will be at least as thick, as major and substantive changes of direction are involved. As you can see by the flag indicators in this document, there were many details that I wished to examine so that I could be effective in questioning the President of the Treasury Board (Mr. Johnston) in the House today. He had announced that he was going to table these estimates.

A great deal of work goes into this. I am not a graduate of a law school specializing in finance. I am not a graduate of the London School of Economics.

**Mr. Baker (Nepean-Carleton):** Thank God for that!

**Some hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Huntington:** I come here from the school of hard knocks. I have put a fair effort into trying to understand the structure in this House in the six years that I have been a member. I have tried to get a working knowledge of the estimates, but I do not find it easy. I think most hon. members do not find this volume with its maze of figures easy to understand. I confess that I find it difficult. I have to work very hard before being ready to hand it over to the public accounts committee and to understand the immense amount of work that committee does in trying to reorganize this information so that it is more meaningful to members of the House.

When the President of the Treasury Board tables his estimates today, he will be taking an historic step in the process of trying to bring control over expenditures back to Parliament. Parliament has lost control over supply. We have a guillotine hanging over our debating time. All of this works to the detriment of members of this House who represent the taxpayers and the people of Canada in overseeing the wise use and expenditure of the tax resource.

A new summary document is to be introduced which will deal with the "envelopes" and the flow of information so that we can have a bird's eye view of what is going on. This is an historic moment for me.

Some members of the opposition and members on the government benches have spent four or five years in the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, but the Auditor General's office has spent some \$25 million, using the best brains in the country from the legal, accounting and management consultant professions, on devising and delivering a form of disclosure which will ensure accountability for the vastly expanded expenditures of the federal government.

As a member, I am denied a right given to the press gallery which is being fed information in a lock-up to which I and my colleagues are denied entry. We are fed steak over in the office of the President of the Treasury Board, then we are supposed to come here as representatives of the people and examine the minister who has all that staff behind him to make sure that he is letter-perfect.

*Privilege—Mr. Huntington*

As a member of the opposition, I want to do my job on behalf of the constituents of the country at large. I really resent being denied access to this information. For one thing, I am a privy councillor and I am a Member of Parliament. In the Standing Committee on Public Accounts the Auditor General of Canada, who is an officer of this House, treats us with a great deal of respect, but this is being denied me as a Member of Parliament by the Treasury Board.

I think the President of the Treasury Board will agree that my grievance is a very real one and I hope that he is sympathetic to it. I therefore move:

That the matter of a Member of Parliament being denied access to a Treasury Board lock-up on estimates at 11 a.m. on February 25, 1981, to which the press was invited be referred to the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections for consideration and report.

**Some hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Hon. Donald J. Johnston (President of the Treasury Board):** Madam Speaker, I respect the point made by the hon. member that there is a good deal of difficulty involved in absorbing the information contained in a volume the size of the main estimates in the short time available to him before coming into this House. I would suggest that attendance at a lock-up which was conducted with the press, for which there is historic precedent, would not have been of great assistance in that exercise. I would add, Madam Speaker, that this is a question which, I believe, should be addressed. The right of members of this House, as I understand privilege, is to receive the estimates when they are presented in the House of Commons, not before.

**An hon. Member:** What about the press?

**Mr. Johnston:** I will come to these points one by one, if I may. It is true that in other instances, a precedent has been established for a lock-up, such as with respect to the Auditor General's report. In addition, there is a lock-up with respect to the budget, but I do not recall being invited to a lock-up when the hon. member for York-Peel (Mr. Stevens) deposited his estimates in the autumn of 1979.

**Mr. Stevens:** They were your estimates.

**Mr. Johnston:** There was no such lock-up. There was no lock-up when the estimates were deposited in this House—

**Mr. Andre:** There were no estimates.

**Mr. Johnston:**—last year, in the spring of 1980. There were complaints from the press because we broke precedent with a tradition which had apparently existed for many years, and there was no press lock-up. There is a tradition according to which the critics for the opposition parties are invited to meet with the President of the Treasury Board before the estimates are deposited in this House. As the hon. member indicated, this took place today over lunch.

I regret very much that the hon. member feels that his privilege has in any way been affected. I suggest that the lock-up is a matter of courtesy, not privilege. The privilege of