

Inquiries of the Ministry

denying a speculative article of that kind. I am sure the hon. gentleman will agree that such questions are most improper.

Mr. Martin (Essex East): I do not agree with the point of order taken by the Prime Minister, Mr. Speaker.

Some hon. Members: Order.

Mr. Martin (Essex East): I am rising on a point of order. I do not agree with the interpretation given by the Prime Minister, but in order to avoid an argument and elicit information I put to the Prime Minister directly this question: Did he receive such a confidential report on December 2, 1957, submitted to him by the air industries and transport association of Canada?

Mr. Diefenbaker: If ever a question contravened the rules of the house, this question does. The hon. member says the report, allegedly confidential, contained certain information. I am not going to be drawn into a discussion of a hypothetical question such as that, designed to leave the impression that there is certain information of that type.

Mr. Martin (Essex East): On the point of order—

Mr. Speaker: The point has been taken that both questions are out of order. If the hon. member wishes to contest that view I will hear him briefly.

Mr. Martin (Essex East): I am rising on a point of order. In the first question I stated that in the *Toronto Star* there was a report that the Prime Minister had been furnished with a confidential document submitted to him by the air industries—

Mr. Harkness: What is your point of order?

Mr. Martin (Essex East):—and I have asked the Prime Minister whether or not such a report was received by him.

Mr. Harkness: That is not a point of order.

Mr. Martin (Essex East): Will my hon. friend kindly contain himself? We are not now discussing agriculture. Under the rules of the house—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am endeavouring to hear the hon. member's point that his question is in order. I would, however, suggest that he confine himself to the point of order rather than to an elaboration of the question.

Mr. Martin (Essex East): With great confidence and respect, Mr. Speaker, I suggest that nothing I have said would in any way warrant the interpretation which is now made by Your Honour. Under the rules of this house—

An hon. Member: A reflection on the Speaker.

Mr. Martin (Essex East): Some hon. member says that we are reflecting on the Speaker. I want the hon. gentleman to know there is nobody in this house who has a higher regard for this Speaker than the hon. member who is now speaking.

Mr. Harkness: You should show it, then.

Mr. Martin (Essex East): Under the rules of the house, if a question is put to a minister that minister may refuse to answer. But if he does refuse to answer he should indicate he does not propose to answer the question. This is not the stand taken by the Prime Minister. A question was put to him and he indulged in certain irrelevancies—

Mr. Speaker: I am sorry, but the hon. member is going in a direction which could lead to a debate. I am concerned only about the point of order. The Prime Minister took exception to the question as being beyond the rules of the house, and I consider that is his right. The hon. member has the right to assert the contrary, and I will try to decide as between the two views which is correct.

Mr. Fulton: On the point of order—

Hon. Lionel Chevrier (Laurier): May I be allowed—

Mr. Speaker: I take it that the hon. member for Laurier would speak to the point of order?

Mr. Chevrier: Yes, I should like to discuss the point of order.

Mr. Fulton: If you do you will be the first one on your side who ever has.

Mr. Chevrier: The Minister of Justice gave a good example of that the other day. However, I should like to discuss the point of order. If I understood it correctly it is this, whether or not a member has the right to ask a question of a minister concerning a private or confidential document or a private or confidential report. This was the purport of the question and the Prime Minister, if I understood him correctly, replied that the question was not in order.

I was under the impression, sir, that we had decided that point by your ruling last year, and certainly during the course of this year, concerning another confidential report. It was made quite clear to everyone that it was a confidential report afterwards made a public document, so my submission to you is that the question framed by the hon. member for Essex East is in order because it simply asks whether or not the minister received a confidential document.