

Alleged Leak re New Airport Site

a decision that should have been kept secret until the last moment. That is what is in issue on the prima facie case aspect of this matter.

The ministers also say that the decision was not made until Thursday, March 27, and that all of this was done on a contingency basis. There is a limit, Mr. Speaker, to the hogwash to which members of this house as well as members of the public should be subjected. Nobody can persuade any reasonable person that the ministers responsible—especially a minister as important as the Minister of Forestry and Rural Development (Mr. Marchand) in this cabinet—would go to the trouble of having a booklet produced, of pre-taping information, without having at least a 99.99 per cent certainty that what they were proposing was going to be accepted.

To suggest that all of this was done on a contingency basis, and that therefore it did not matter, is utter hogwash and again underlines, in my submission, the fact that the ministers themselves are now uneasy and are trying to argue the merits of the case, which as you have stated, Mr. Speaker, is not what is before us today.

In order to support their insupportable position, they also refer to the fact that their lawyers had expropriation papers ready. I expect, from what the Minister of Transport has said, that they probably had expropriation papers ready for all of the sites that were under contemplation. This can easily be done. The lawyers have the form all ready, and after the announcement is made in Ottawa a telephone call is made to them and they put the appropriate name and location on the form, and away it goes. What kind of nonsense is it to suggest that because the lawyers had to have the form ready this had anything to do with making the matter public! The form need not have contained either the name or the location in question, or anything relevant thereto.

Neither is it a defence on this point, the question of whether there is a prima facie case, to say that nobody could have gained from speculating in this matter. I want to make clear—and I think the hon. member for Calgary North (Mr. Woolliams) did so last Friday—that I am not suggesting that these ministers did anything deliberately to hurt the Canadian people. I am not suggesting that at all. Nor, as I understood it, did the hon. member for Calgary North suggest that. All that I am suggesting is that these gentlemen are human and that, as the last number of

[Mr. Lewis.]

months have shown, they are quite easily prone to bad judgment.

There is a full prima facie case to the effect that in this particular instance their judgment was bad; that a committee of this house should inquire into it and declare whether or not their judgment was bad. The committee must decide whether there was the kind of urgency about preparing these statements as to justify taking the extraordinary and undesirable step of making something public before it was officially announced in the house. The committee should determine whether all of these steps that were taken were demanded by the public interest, or were demanded either by a desire for publicity or, more likely, by a desire, and I say a perfectly proper desire, to make sure that the people in the province of Quebec who were disappointed by the particular decision would be given the kind of explanation that would assuage their disappointment, if that were at all possible.

However, Mr. Speaker, all of this might have been done after the announcement was made. It is for the committee to ascertain whether the urgency was so great as to permit of the possibility of a leak that could have—I do not say did have or would have, but could have—been of great disadvantage to the Canadian people and could have resulted in a large increase in cost for this airport, as well as in entirely improper gains, not only for the people who might be expropriated to make way for the airport, but for people in the area around the airport which would also be affected in the matter of price.

For all of these reasons I urge Your Honour to hold that there is a prima facie case here that ought to go to the committee.

Hon. Donald S. Macdonald (President of the Privy Council): Mr. Speaker, I rise to deal with the procedure of this house that is involved here, and I speak about that only. My two colleagues have spoken on the facts of the matter and obviously they are in a better position than I to talk of the facts. I should like to make a brief submission about the nature of our parliamentary privilege; the question Your Honour has to decide is whether, prima facie, the facts indicate that there was a breach of the privilege of this house.

I should like to commence my remarks by referring to May's 17th edition, page 42, where the author states:

Parliamentary privilege is the sum of the peculiar rights enjoyed by each house collectively