

Business of the House

[*Translation*]

Mr. Fortin: As for the second part of the question, would the government house leader inform the House what steps he intends to take in the near future in relation to offices and secretarial staff in the electoral districts?

[*English*]

Mr. MacEachen: I think it is well known to hon. members that the Commissioners of Internal Economy under the chairmanship of Mr. Speaker passed a minute some time ago providing the authority to engage additional secretarial staff and to make office space available for members in their constituencies. However, my advice is that no vote exists at the present time from which such facilities can be provided unless we have recourse to the contingency fund, a course which does not seem to be an entirely popular one with the House. Therefore, the best I can do is assure hon. members that the first supplementary estimates which come before the House will make provision for such services. I have no other way of providing the money, even from my own limited resources.

Mr. Stevens: Mr. Speaker, unfortunately the Minister of Transport has left the House, but I rise on a point of order with respect to the action taken by him today in tabling papers with regard to the proposed airport at Pickering rather than making a statement on motions.

I think this is particularly regrettable, in view of the fact that the papers filed state there is to be an independent board of inquiry. The members are then listed as: Chairman, blank; Vice-Chairman, blank; Board members, blank. On January 30, the minister told the House that a report would be made within 12 months. We now see, from the papers which the minister tabled, that it is to be 12 months from the date the board is appointed, whatever that date may be.

Mr. Stanbury: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I think I should respond at the first opportunity to the question of privilege raised earlier, I understand, by the hon. member for Burnaby-Richmond-Delta. I would like to apologise to him if he feels misled by any answer I gave yesterday. It was certainly not my intention to mislead him. I think he will appreciate that there are certain limitations on the length of replies one can give in the House; there certainly were yesterday. I wish to reiterate what I have said outside the House: I have asked my officials not to issue further permission for highway sufferance warehouses until some progress has been made on a general review of the policy followed in this respect. While I understand that my officials have been encountering pressure from several firms wishing to open such warehouses in Vancouver, I am advised they have not committed the department to any positive decision on the question of additional warehouses. They have simply indicated to the firms pressing the department on this subject that they would welcome any representations and presentations which those firms might like to make.

I think it is preferable that we follow this procedure, as was suggested yesterday by the hon. member for New Westminster, rather than continue to be satisfied, as we have been for so long, with simply taking the first firm that comes long.

Mr. Speaker: The minister's statement has been made by way of response to a question of privilege. Earlier, I suggested it was not a question of privilege, that it was rather a matter of debate between the hon. member and the minister. So perhaps I should not have allowed the minister to reply. But since I appear to have forgotten what my ruling was when the hon. member for Burnaby-Richmond-Delta raised the matter, I suggest he might be allowed to ask a supplementary question.

Mr. Reynolds: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I shall not take up much time. I thank the minister for getting himself off the hook in connection with his statement in the House yesterday. If he did not misinform the House, then his officials are misinforming him, because it was his own department which contacted two firms today and asked for their submissions. And they did not put any pressure on the department.

Mr. Stanbury: On a question of privilege, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I presume the hon. minister's proposed question of privilege relates to the statement just made by the hon. member for Burnaby-Richmond-Delta. I hope this will not go on all the afternoon.

Mr. Stanbury: I hope so too, Your Honour. If the hon. member for Burnaby-Richmond-Delta had followed the same procedure as the other hon. member interested in this matter, he would have discussed it thoroughly with me outside the House and had an opportunity to get all the details rather than use this chamber to make some kind of partisan point.

Some hon. Members: Oh!

Mr. Stanbury: The department was responding to requests from those firms.

Mr. Speaker: I suggest we are continuing a debate between the minister and the hon. member. I hope that both hon. gentlemen might meet later in the afternoon, at their convenience and try to straighten the matter out. I do not think we can solve it by a series of alleged questions of privilege.

Mr. Reynolds: I hesitate to say this, Mr. Speaker, but the minister stated that if I contacted him I would be given details. I have letters on my files on the same proposal. He is using the floor of this House to try to hose the people into believing that he is right. He is trying to hose the people of Vancouver.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I shall not say what I was about to say. It might not have been charitable. I shall call orders of the day.