

report" do not appear in it. All these assertions refer to the content of the document.

The rule is very clear. It is based upon the rule of evidence in a court of law which prevents people referring to documents unless they are prepared to produce them so that others who are interested can make their own observations. It is unfair to allow the minister to refer to the contents of the document without producing it so that we can make our own assessment. We must read it to know what the truth is.

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

**Mr. Speaker:** If there are no further arguments to be submitted, either in support of the hon. member's contention or in opposition thereto, I am quite prepared to make a ruling.

As hon. members know, this matter of the obligation on the part of either individual members or members of the cabinet to table or produce a document which has been quoted is a rule which is often disputed in the House. It is very seldom that a protracted debate on an important subject takes place in the House without a member rising on a point of order or a question of privilege to suggest that a document which has been referred to by another hon. member in debate ought to be tabled immediately, and the Chair is called upon to consider the precedents and citations and to make a ruling. The hon. member for Yukon will himself recognize that this is a matter of general interest that has been considered by the Chair on numerous occasions.

• (3:30 p.m.)

I suggest to hon. members that the citation to which the hon. members for Yukon and Peace River have alluded has to be interpreted rather strictly. I have to agree with the contention that if the reference made to a public document is not, as the citation says, a quotation from that document, it would be very difficult for the Chair to rule that the document ought to be tabled.

In fairness, looking at the matter as objectively as I can, I do not see how it is possible for the Chair to make a ruling at this point that a document that has simply been referred to but has not been directly quoted should be tabled in debate. I find it difficult to rule otherwise. Hon. members may look at the citations that have been quoted in a very interesting and forceful way by the hon. members for Yukon and Peace River. They are clear to me. If a document has been actually cited or quoted in debate by a minister of the Crown, it has to be tabled. If only reference is made to it, I do not see how there can be an obligation to table it.

I remember that when a similar matter was raised previously the suggestion was made that perhaps the remedy of members of the opposition is to move for the production of the document. I appreciate that this is not a very useful remedy in view of the rules. The way we have been operating is that a motion for the production of documents is sometimes debated, but it is difficult to bring it forward for debate and it very often falls to the bottom of the list and many months pass before the matter can be considered again. Therefore I cannot seriously suggest to hon. members that this is their remedy.

### *Inquiries of the Ministry*

With respect, I have to make the ruling that the citation quoted does not apply in the present circumstances and therefore I cannot rule that the document in question should be tabled.

#### FOREIGN OWNERSHIP—POSSIBLE CREATION OF SCREENING MECHANISM TO REGULATE TAKEOVERS—ACCURACY OF MONTREAL "GAZETTE" VERSION OF CABINET DOCUMENT

**Mr. T. C. Douglas (Nanaimo-Cowichan-The Islands):** Mr. Speaker, may I direct a question to the Acting Prime Minister which arises out of his statement that there are discrepancies between the document that appeared in the *Montreal Gazette* and the actual cabinet document to which it refers. May I first quote the paragraph in the alleged cabinet document headed "A":

The cabinet agreed in principle that the main policy approach to the issue of foreign ownership should be the creation of a screening mechanism that would cover foreign takeovers of Canadian firms doing business in Canada—

May I ask the Acting Prime Minister whether that paragraph is an accurate reproduction of the words contained in the original document to which it refers?

**Hon. Mitchell Sharp (Acting Prime Minister):** Mr. Speaker, I was referring to discrepancies because I had discovered some. I cannot say for certain whether there are discrepancies in the first paragraph, but I certainly would not want to say that they were serious or that they are misleading.

**Mr. Douglas:** In view of the fact the Acting Prime Minister has a very selective memory and remembers some discrepancies but not others, may I ask him whether he is now telling the House that the government did not decide last July to accept in principle the concept of setting up a screening mechanism to deal with foreign takeovers?

**Mr. Sharp:** Mr. Speaker, when this question was put to me by the Leader of the Opposition I made the statement that this was a matter of cabinet secrecy and I am bound by my oath not to disclose what goes on in cabinet. Therefore I am afraid I cannot answer that question directly without breaking my oath. What I do want to say to the hon. member and to the House is that no decisions have yet been made on the policy that this government intends to adopt toward foreign ownership, and that is the simple truth.

**Mr. Douglas:** Mr. Speaker, may I ask a final supplementary question. Since the publication of now two cabinet documents indicates either that they were stolen or that they were deliberately leaked to the press, I should like to ask the Acting Prime Minister whether this is a manifestation either of the government's gross incompetence or wilful deception?

**Mr. Speaker:** Order, please.

#### FOREIGN OWNERSHIP—SUGGESTED POSSESSION OF CABINET DOCUMENT BY OWNERS OF OTTAWA "CITIZEN"

**Mr. G. W. Baldwin (Peace River):** Mr. Speaker, may I ask the Acting Prime Minister whether the government or