

*Supply—Public Works*

**Mr. Fleming:** Then the total cost to the government by the time the property has been completely renovated will be about \$275,000.

**Mr. Fournier (Hull):** I would not give any definite figure. Personally I do not know because I have not found anybody yet who can give a final estimate of the cost.

**Mr. Fleming:** Mr. Chairman, no one in this house criticized the idea of acquiring a home for the Prime Minister. When the announcement was made in the house by the then acting prime minister a reservation was made by some as to the selection of this particular property for the purpose. The question will be present in the minds of many members as to whether this was the best residence available at the cost. I am bound to say that it amazes me as a member of the house that the government has embarked upon this project without having some idea of the cost of renovation before they started.

**Mr. Abbott:** The minister has given it to you.

**Mr. Fleming:** The Minister of Public Works, a very experienced minister, has just told us that he did not even at this stage—

**The Deputy Chairman:** Order. I think the hon. member will admit that we are now discussing an item of \$35,000 for repairs, alterations and improvements to the Prime Minister's residence. I do not think the hon. member should go back and question the decision as to whether this or another house should have been bought.

**Mr. Fleming:** I submit, Mr. Chairman, that I am entirely in order in trying to get to the bottom of this project. Here we are asked to vote another \$35,000—

**The Deputy Chairman:** Order. I appreciate that the decisions of the chairman are not always satisfactory to hon. members, especially when they want to advance a certain point of view; but in my understanding of this discussion the hon. member is out of order when he raises the question on this item of whether the government should have bought this property or another.

**Mr. Green:** I point out to you, Mr. Chairman, that the hon. member for Eglinton was not discussing whether the house should have been bought. He is trying to get at the total amount it is going to cost, and I submit that is quite in order.

**The Deputy Chairman:** I am quite prepared to give as much latitude on this item as may be permissible, and so far I believe I have done so. I am simply warning the hon. member for Eglinton, when he says the

minister should not have gone into this project without having any idea of the cost, and makes statements of that kind, that we are now discussing an item of \$35,000 for repairs, alterations and improvements. That is all I am doing at the moment.

**Mr. Fleming:** Before you make any ruling, Mr. Chairman, I want to make it quite clear that what I am talking about now is this item of \$35,000. The considerations I am putting forward are strictly relevant to the question whether this house should provide \$35,000 when, even at this stage, the minister is not able to give us an estimate of the final cost. Apparently the government has just gone ahead without doing what any sensible member of this chamber would have done, that is, finding out what it was going to cost before commencing the project. It amazes me that at this stage, in March, 1950, nearly a year after the decision was made to take this property and renovate it for use as a residence for the Prime Minister, the government cannot give us an estimate of the total cost of the entire undertaking. I have tried as best I could to get the figures and put them together. When we do add up the figures the minister has given us, he will not commit himself in any degree to the total we arrive at.

I am in complete accord with the idea that a suitable home should be provided for the Prime Minister of this country; let there be no mistake about that. At the same time, as a matter of common sense and ordinary sensible business practice I believe the government should know the cost of a project before it undertakes it. Obviously that was not done in this case, and I think it is a ridiculous way of doing business.

I am going to ask this further question—

**Mr. Fournier (Hull):** Before you use that word "ridiculous"—

**Mr. Fleming:** I ask the minister to give us—

**The Deputy Chairman:** Order. The hon. member for Eglinton has the floor.

**Mr. Fleming:** I am trying to facilitate the minister's reply by saying there is one other question I wish to ask.

**Mr. Fournier (Hull):** You will not facilitate anything by calling this ridiculous.

**Mr. Fleming:** I certainly will call any practice ridiculous under which a government blithely goes ahead with a project of this size without having any idea in advance of what the cost is going to be. If I understood the minister's statement correctly, that is precisely the situation that confronts the government and the rest of us at this moment.