

Inquiries of the Ministry

Mr. McIlraith: On a charge like that, Mr. Speaker, I believe it is only fair that I have an opportunity to reply. I have sought to show respect to Parliament and to the other government concerned in this matter.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McIlraith: The press release was issued at 2.40, Mr. Speaker. The information I gave in answer to the question by the Leader of the Opposition was precisely correct at that point of time. It had not been decided to issue the press release at that time for a very good reason.

Mr. Hees: If the press release was issued at 2.40, it was obviously prepared a long time before that. What was the reason for not giving this information to the House when I asked for it?

Mr. McIlraith: I would be glad to give the reason.

Mr. Hees: Well, let's have it.

Mr. Eldon M. Woolliams (Calgary North): Will the minister clear up something that must be in the minds of everyone? I refer to the fact that it took so long before you made this decision. Would you mind explaining to the House and the country why there was such a delay?

Mr. McIlraith: Yes, I will be glad to.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. Both the hon. member for Calgary North and the hon. member for Prince Edward-Hastings have addressed themselves to the minister. They should address their questions to the Chair.

Mr. McIlraith: Mr. Speaker, as I indicated last week, this matter was under continuous consideration from day to day. As to what arose today, at two o'clock, after the bell started to ring summoning the House to meet, a new matter arose that completely changed the answer that I would have given at five minutes to two. That matter had to be checked out, and it was checked out between two and 2.40. Surely hon. members are capable of understanding a simple matter like that.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Speaker: Order. There are two or three supplementaries. I recognize the hon. member for Nanaimo-Cowichan-The Islands on a supplementary.

Mr. T. C. Douglas (Nanaimo-Cowichan-The Islands): Mr. Speaker, members can understand that the Solicitor General had to have the concurrence of the government of Quebec before the decision and the announcement could be made. When did the government of Canada and the government of Quebec reach the decision that a reward would be offered; and when was the press release prepared announcing that such a decision had been reached?

Mr. McIlraith: The final draft of the press release would have been made some time about two o'clock today.

Mr. Douglas (Nanaimo-Cowichan-The Islands): When was the decision made?

Mr. McIlraith: The decision that a reward would be authorized, if and when the circumstances warranted it and it would not do more damage than good in view of other elements that may have arisen in the consideration of the criminal cases, was made, many days, indeed some weeks, ago.

Mr. Hees: A supplementary question, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Chair will allow the hon. member for Prince Edward-Hastings a supplementary.

Mr. Hees: Would the Solicitor General now advise the House what important information came to his attention at two o'clock to make him change his mind?

Mr. McIlraith: No, Mr. Speaker, I would not be in a position to give that information at this time. I would be very happy to give the information, and I hope I can give it soon so that the House will have the opportunity of assessing for itself how utterly irresponsible the hon. member for Prince Edward-Hastings is in these matters.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Hees: Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. It seems to me we are now getting into a debate between the minister and the hon. member, and certainly that would not be very helpful.

Mr. Hees: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker, the minister accused me of being utterly irresponsible.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hees: I asked him a very responsible and important question and he gave me an answer contrary to the facts just announced. I asked him what had changed his mind, and he replied that I was irresponsible for asking that question.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Hees: That is the sort of nonsense that we get from this government day after day.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Before calling orders of the day, I believe the hon. member for Cape Breton-East Richmond has a supplementary.

Mr. Donald MacInnis (Cape Breton-East Richmond): I have a supplementary question for the Solicitor General. At 2.15 the Solicitor General said that the government was giving consideration to the offering of a reward. Now the Solicitor General informs the House that the government of Canada has decided to offer a reward. Am I to understand from this statement that the government of Canada does not exist, or the Prime Minister and the other cabinet ministers in the House today?

Mr. Speaker: Order. Again I suggest, with respect, that this is developing into a debate between hon. members and the minister. If the House will agree to return to the item "First Reading of Senate public Bills", I understand there is an item that should have been called at that point.

Some hon. Members: Agreed.