

not only being contemplated but that it was being done at that time.

In other words, press secretaries were running around this building passing out letters in French or English, depending on the reporter, and the minister who was standing up answering questions on the economy did not have the courtesy to tell the people in this House and Canadians directly what the government was doing.

The government should be more forthcoming and more honest with Canadians.

Mr. George S. Baker (Gander—Grand Falls): Madam Speaker, on the same point of order. The NDP and the government House leader in saying that it is not a point of privilege and not a point of order are forgetting the fundamental reason why we are here.

There is such a thing as accountability to the people of Canada through this House. This is not an ordinary announcement that the hon. minister has just released here today. This is not an ordinary piddling little announcement on something. No, this is a major change in the budget and the estimates of the government departments going through this Chamber. This is a major change. The outline given outside the doors to this Chamber talks about exactly \$500 million in the next two months, one-half billion dollars while the estimates, while the legislation arising out of the budget of the estimates of the department, are going through this Chamber.

Madam Speaker, I want you to keep in mind and I would like you to think about this: There is only one reason why this Chamber sits. There is only one reason primary why this Chamber, called the Parliament of Canada, sits here. That is to make the government accountable to the people of Canada through this Chamber because there is no other mechanism.

We debate in this House all the time our rules concerning Question Period and the accountability of the government to the people. We have seen the erosion of certain principles of accountability like committee of the whole because it has all become very complex.

This smacks at that very principle. The government cannot, while we are sitting on a Friday afternoon, keep it in mind, circulate outside this Chamber a document

which changes the very business that we are considering in estimates which were approved by this Chamber and on which we have spent months.

Here the government is changing the entire business of the country on a Friday afternoon at 20 minutes after twelve o'clock outside this Chamber without allowing it to be heard and to permit us to do our job as members of Parliament.

Hon. Gilles Loiselle (President of the Treasury Board and Minister of State (Finance)): Madam Speaker, on a question of privilege. I would like to table in the House the letter that was sent by the secretary-general of the Treasury Board to other deputy ministers to inform them of the decisions they have to make pertaining to the management of their departments.

[Translation]

Madam Deputy Speaker: I suggest there is no need at this time to make decisions, rulings or assumptions, to look at what this or that person may have done and to decide one way or the other. I think that, over the years, in the Canadian practice and laws, several Speakers' rulings have reaffirmed that documents circulated outside this House can not normally form the basis of a question of privilege. The President of the Treasury Board has indicated that, in any case, he will be tabling this document at the call of the "Tabling of documents". I promise to take this up anyway with the Speaker and we will get back to the House on this if need be. But for the time being, I believe the matter is closed.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1220)

[Translation]

HOUSE MANAGEMENT

51ST REPORT OF STANDING COMMITTEE

Mr. Charles A. Langlois (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Industry, Science and Technology): Madam Speaker, I have the honour to present the 51st report of the Standing Committee on House Management dealing with the selection of Private Members' Business items as votable items.