

importance. The document points out the skyrocketing interest rates on public debt and sharp rises in military spending. It sets forth that the government has reversed a program of cuts in the size of the public service made over the last two years. That information must have been obtained from the estimates and from no other source. It deals with defence spending, which will increase 16.6 per cent to \$5.9 billion. It deals with new military hardware which includes fighter jets, patrol aircraft and tanks.

Mr. Beatty: With the stock exchange still open.

Mr. Baker (Nepean-Carleton): Yes, incidentally, the stock exchange was still open when this went over the wires. Surely that must mean that the lock-up was for something.

Some hon. Members: Shame on you!

Mr. Baker (Nepean-Carleton): I am sorry that I am inconveniencing members on the other side of the House.

Madam Speaker, I think it is a clear violation of the rights of members of Parliament for others to see these estimates before they are tabled. That is why we have a lock-up. That is why the press is set aside, so that these matters can be tabled in the House for Members of Parliament, who are responsible in some way for the expenditures of government and for its accounting.

If you find there is a prima facie case of privilege with respect to this matter, I am prepared to move:

That the matter of the dissemination of details of the estimates through the news media before tabling of the estimates in this House be referred to the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Yvon Pinard (President of the Privy Council): Madam Speaker, it is a shame to see how the Tories have set a trap for the press.

[*Translation*]

I cannot accept, Madam Speaker, that after displaying such childish behaviour all afternoon, the members of the Progressive Conservative Party now stand up and say that the estimates have not been tabled on time and claim that since the media reported it, there has been a breach of hon. members' privileges.

Madam Speaker, if someone did not respect the hon. members and this institution today on that matter, it is the members of the Progressive Conservative Party who have been wasting the time of this House since about three o'clock this afternoon. It is a shame to see those members doing what they did this afternoon, under the circumstances. This Parliament has now to assume responsibilities in the fields of economy, energy, the constitution and various sectors in the social area. I am aghast at the behaviour of the official opposition under those circumstances. We could perhaps understand that the forthcoming events during the weekend may have some influence on their behaviour but even so it is irresponsible.

Privilege—Mr. W. Baker

What I want to say on the question of privilege which has just been raised by the hon. member for Nepean-Carleton (Mr. Baker) is that you stated earlier today that there was nothing reprehensible in the attitude of the government and especially in the action by the President of the Treasury Board when he disclosed the contents of the government estimates in a lock-up with the media. It is a fact, your decision has been made, we have done nothing—

Madam Speaker: I would like to interrupt the minister and ask him not to put words in my mouth. I dealt with the question of privilege which has been raised but I did not pass judgment on a government action.

Mr. Pinard: Madam Speaker, in connection with your decision, you stated that there was no question of privilege when the members opposite objected to the lock-up with the media and the failure to notify the members of this House and this is what I was referring to. Now if I do not interpret your decision correctly, Madam Speaker, I beg you to correct me and tell me where I am wrong. If you do not do so, I shall infer I was right. That was my point.

The fact is we did nothing wrong. If now, as a result of the filibustering of the Conservative members the tabling of our estimates is delayed and it becomes a known fact that some aspects of our estimates have been made public, the government cannot be blamed. It is not our fault, even if we held a meeting behind closed doors with the media, since you deemed the procedure was not objectionable but normal. Now who is to be blamed? Well, those who waste our time and who have made the press fall into the trap and take the blame.

Well, Madam Speaker, the facts are as follows: in addition to the lock-up with the press, I am told that the press signed an agreement containing an embargo under which the media agreed not to publish the contents of the estimates until they are tabled. So, if there has been a leak, of course, neither the President of the Treasury Board nor the government can be blamed, nor anyone, to my mind, who respected the embargo. I do not know whether or not the allegations of my colleague from Nepean-Carleton are accurate. I have no reason to doubt his word, but if one or several journalists have failed to respect the signed agreement, well, they can settle their accounts with the Progressive Conservative members who laid the trap for them to fall in; but, as far as we are concerned, we have nothing to blame ourselves for.

As a government, Madam Speaker, we followed the tradition. I mentioned it before: we briefed the media at a lock-up and also, as a courtesy, sometime around noon, the President of the Treasury Board invited to a briefing a few representatives of the Progressive Conservative Party and the NDP. Under those circumstances, the government merely respected tradition. There has been no impropriety. Your decision, Madam Speaker, confirmed that there was no question of