

Privilege—Mr. Goyer

the letter had been dealt with. Given the above facts, it is easily understood why I did not ask whether or not the RCMP was involved in the break-in. Any other member would have acted in the same way.

Some hon. Members: Oh!

Mr. Goyer: The Quebec justice minister's statement denying that any of the three police forces were involved in the theft of documents was never brought to my attention as false. On November 27, 1972, I was appointed Minister of Supply and Services and the very first time I learned of RCMP involvement in the break-in was in March 1976.

I would like to remind the House that neither the deputy solicitor general nor the then Director, Security Planning and Research Group, were made aware of RCMP participation in this operation before March 16, 1976. The established practice called for their being informed of important questions pertaining to the RCMP's activities to allow them to assist me in following up on such matters. Normally, at least one of them attended my meetings with the police. Neither one remembers even hearing about RCMP involvement in the break-in at the APLQ.

I know that I was not informed of the incident. There can be no doubt in the minds of hon. members that I was not informed and moreover that I had no reason to suspect that the RCMP could have participated in the break-in.

There should be no doubt also in the minds of hon. members that this illegal break-in is an isolated incident and is far from reflecting force policy. The RCMP and the security services have an outstanding record in carrying out their duties. They may have made mistakes but on the whole the RCMP deserves the recognition that it has earned both within and outside Canada.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Joe Clark (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, the fact which we must underline at the beginning of our response is that the Minister of Supply and Services declined the opportunity which was available to him on this question of privilege to move a reference of this matter to a committee of the House of Commons for consideration so that he, and others who might be concerned, would have an opportunity to investigate it further, and so that questions might be asked. He had the opportunity, as the matter stands under the rules of the House, to move a motion which would have referred the question of privilege which caused him to rise in the House to a standing committee of the House. This would have given the opportunity for a full investigation. He declined to do that. That is not acceptable to us on this side of the House.

● (1520)

He also declined, Mr. Speaker, to seek an opportunity which again would have allowed some questions in the House; he could have sought permission of the House to make a statement on motions. I make it clear that had that permission been sought from this party in the House—and I am sure I speak

[Mr. Goyer.]

for the others—it would have been granted, so that there would have been an opportunity to pose questions directly to the Minister of Supply and Services.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The minister has, I take it, given an undertaking to answer questions if they are put to him here. There is now no question about resolving the matter by way of a question of privilege. As the Leader of the Opposition has pointed out, there was no motion attached. I simply want to make sure that we know where we are heading from a procedural point of view. I am sure there will be a desire to ask questions of the minister and I think members ought to avail themselves of that opportunity; but I do not know that we ought to avail ourselves of the opportunity both to discuss privilege and to question the minister. I think we should do one or the other and probably the more effective procedure would be to question the minister.

Mr. Clark: Mr. Speaker, I did not hear the portion of the minister's remarks in which he undertook to answer questions and I apologize to him for that. I appreciate having the opportunity to pose questions. I should say on the question of privilege generally that we on this side of the House are very troubled, as I would hope members on the other side of the House would be troubled, by the abandonment here of the tradition and principle of ministerial responsibility on the part of the minister, in effect passing the responsibility for his actions to his officials.

Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton): Again.

Mr. Clark: My colleague says "again", and that is quite correct. The minister has said that he was briefed about this investigation before the break-in. Can he tell the House of Commons what instructions—

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Clark: Let me be clear, Mr. Speaker. Did the minister say that he had been briefed by the RCM Police or by any of the security forces, on any matter relating to any of the organizations into whose premises the break-in occurred, before the break-in?

[Translation]

Mr. Goyer: Mr. Speaker, I am nevertheless surprised to see that after insisting so much to have me make a statement under oath today, the Leader of the Opposition is not satisfied and wants to go further and further! He will have to make up his mind one day on what he wants to say and express it.

In answer to his question, I said, and I quote:

[English]

I had been briefed several times about certain activities of the APLQ and its alleged links with well known terrorists and convicted criminals. But nothing could have justified illegal acts being carried out by the RCMP or by any Canadian citizen for that matter.

Mr. Clark: My question to the minister was: When did the briefings begin? Did his briefings begin before the alleged break-in?