

really want to solve the matter and learn exactly what happened.

[English]

Mr. Leonard C. Jones (Moncton): Mr. Speaker, I wish to ask the minister three questions. They will be very brief and he can answer them briefly. Will all the members of the cabinet, the parliamentary secretaries, their predecessors in office, their respective staffs and all relevant documents, be compellable witnesses and compellable documents by subpoena or otherwise? Does this inquiry include certain problems that are taking place in the RCMP in New Brunswick? Will the government pay for counsel and legal fees for the RCMP individually and collectively?

Mr. Fox: Mr. Speaker, with regard to the first question I believe the answer in broad terms will be no. With regard to the second question relating to the RCMP inquiry by the New Brunswick government, once again the answer is no, if I understood the question. On the third question as to whether legal counsel would be provided to members of the force, there is a force policy under which in most cases funds for legal assistance are provided to members of the force in connection with things that may have been done in the pursuit of their duties.

Mr. Jones: Do I understand that the inquiry will not have the right to subpoena members of the cabinet?

Mr. Fox: Mr. Speaker, if it is a legal question the hon. member is asking me, I will have to check. However, I cannot imagine that if any member of the cabinet is asked to supply relevant information to the commission of inquiry, he would not be willing to do so.

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● (1700)

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker, I have two questions for the government House leader. First, what is the intention of the government with respect to business for tomorrow, Friday, and next week?

Mr. MacEachen: Tomorrow we shall resume the third reading of Bill C-27 followed by C-17, the Air Canada bill, and C-49. Next week I would hope also to deal with the report stage of the amendments to the criminal law.

Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton): The other question I have in mind relates to the debate on national unity which, according to the understanding between all parties, was to occupy two days. By the luck of the draw, there happened to be one long day and one short day. The government saw fit, for a reason which escapes me, to make a statement in the middle of the short day. I am being charitable when I say the reason escapes me; this has happened on other occasions and I think it is a practice which ought to be avoided. That a statement of at

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least partial capitulation, which some have called a cover-up, should have made in relation to an important matter on a day set aside for a debate on national unity is beyond my comprehension, and the government House leader owes an apology for dealing with the matter in that way.

In addition, he owes us some time. I am not worrying about the time we took up on the question of parliamentary privilege. That is part of the normal parliamentary process and I might add that more could be heard about that matter tomorrow. But as to the statement catapulted in by the minister, I believe the request made by one member of the House to extend the time set aside for the debate so as at least to make up the period lost, about an hour and 45 minutes, ought to be granted by the government House leader, and I would ask him to seek whatever order might be required so that the time could be made up.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. MacEachen: The hon. member says it escapes him why the Solicitor General (Mr. Fox) decided to make a statement today.

An hon. Member: It doesn't escape me.

Mr. MacEachen: It does not escape me, either. The reason is related to the importance of the matter, one which, in the opinion of the Speaker, was of such urgency just a short time ago that the business of the House of Commons was set aside to deal with it. It was the view of the government that just as soon as a decision had been taken to establish a royal commission related to our national security, that decision should be communicated to the House of Commons as quickly as possible.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. MacEachen: That is why the statement was made today. It was because of the gravity of the subject matter, and for no other reason. The hon. member said his question of privilege was part of the parliamentary process. Of course it was. But a statement by a minister is also part of the parliamentary process and was justified on the grounds I have indicated.

The hon. member has suggested that further time might be made available for today's debate on national unity. I am not ready to make or to receive a proposal at the present time because I know the circumstances are not right and that the mood is not right at the moment for securing the kind of concurrence which would be required. However, I would be ready to consult through usual channels to determine whether it would be possible to agree on some extended period. The hon. member for Grenville-Carleton (Mr. Baker) must bear in mind that the proceedings of the House have been taken up with these two matters—important matters—which have engaged the time, interest, and intellect of members of the opposition, for the most part, rather than members of the government.