

Privilege

which related, or might relate, to a member of parliament sitting with the Progressive Conservative opposition.

Naturally, I do not intend to disclose the nature of the conversation between the right hon. gentleman and myself except to say that I did not contact the hon. member for Leeds in relation to that conversation. This was for two reasons. One was that I did not wish to appear to be interfering in any way with appropriate legal procedures which might be brought into play, and to which allusion has been made, and, second, because I did not want to appear to be placing any pressure upon the hon. member for Leeds to take action which might limit his right and privilege to act as he believes he ought to act here on the floor of the House of Commons.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Clark: What has changed, as I became aware when the hon. member for Leeds spoke to me briefly before the beginning of this day's sitting, is that the hon. member for Leeds indicated to me that the Solicitor General (Mr. Blais) and General Darré presented to the hon. member a range of different actions which might be taken in relation to the hon. member for Leeds. I do not propose to go further into that argument, one which has already been made in the House, except to say that I think the spelling out, the deliberate communication to a member of parliament of those alternatives, which might have involved the laying of a criminal charge, coupled with the compression of time, a requirement that a member of parliament reply to the Solicitor General within a matter of four hours, are circumstances which reek of intimidation.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Clark: There is one other matter to which I must refer. There is a reason why members of the House of Commons enjoy special protection relative to access of information. We are, after all, the elected representatives of the people of Canada. Though this is too often forgotten, perhaps, in some corners of this chamber, we are collectively the body to which the government is responsible for all its activities. It is therefore highly important that members of parliament retain intact their ability to use information which relates to the national business and which might come into their possession. This is a most important principle.

None of us should be intimidated in relation to the use, in what is seen to be in the national interest, of information which comes to us. Such information might very well affect the conduct of the government or the protection of the Canadian national interest. We have a right in this House to use that kind of information responsibly and we have the right to be free from any odour of intimidation with respect to its use.

It seems to me there has been evidence here of action which the hon. member for Leeds can only interpret as an attempt to intimidate, an attempt to force him to do something he might not otherwise have chosen to do. What underlined and emphasized that action was the very narrow time frame imposed by telephone by the Solicitor General when he, in effect, declined

to extend to the hon. member for Leeds the opportunity to carry out the fullest possible consultation whether with his counsel, which is one important right available to the hon. member as a private citizen, or with others who might be able to advise him fully as to the parliamentary implications. This would include the opportunity to discuss the matter with Your Honour and with other members of the House of Commons.

That being the case, I believe the actions which were taken by the Solicitor General in going to a member of parliament, taking with him the chief security officer of the country and setting forth a range of alternatives which might be followed if the hon. member did not do as the Solicitor General wanted him to do, and then imposing a time frame within which the hon. member for Leeds was expected to react, constituted a major threat to the privileges of members of parliament. I hope it will be possible for the hon. member for Leeds to consider this matter without a threat of any kind directed toward him, in order that he might assess his position under the law and in relation to his rights and privileges as a member of the House of Commons.

Mr. Elmer M. MacKay (Central Nova): Mr. Speaker, I think it is obvious that a great deal of this difficulty comes down in the final analysis to what is, or what is not, a question of national security. It is odd that this matter has not received more attention from the government in the past.

At this very time when the McDonald Commission is looking into this whole subject, it has been necessary for the Commission to appoint counsel in Toronto to provide a definition of what really constitutes national security. This is the logical culmination of events which have been building up for a long time. It is simply this: in matters of police and security affairs, members of parliament and members of the government have not been given true and accurate information. The present Solicitor General (Mr. Blais) was as surprised as anyone else when he found out mail was being opened, or so he said. I could mention many matters which have come out in the last few months and have caused the government, and those responsible for national security, to modify or change their positions.

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This particular situation has caused members of parliament to be very nervous and to seek the truth. The fact that they are doing this, and obviously are being assisted sometimes by persons in security roles, is a very good reason for the government to take a hard look at what it has allowed to develop over the years. That is simply this: our security is out of control and operating without the knowledge of those responsible by law or by statute for its direction.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member for Leeds (Mr. Cossitt) said, this is perhaps one of the most important questions which have been raised in a little while. I hope the House will bear with me if I speak for a few minutes on it.