

Privilege—Mr. S. J. Robinson

within a few days, that report would be released. That was not off the cuff, nor was it off the top of the minister's head. Exactly the same question was asked the next day, the Tuesday, in this House, and essentially the same reply was given.

Later the minister backtracked and backtracked greatly, in the House, at a press conference and at the meeting of the justice committee, and this obviously affects the privileges of the members of this House. He said at that time that he would not necessarily release the contents of the report when he got it, in direct contradiction to what he had said in the House, because now another group would take a look at it, namely, there was to be a coroner's inquest.

● (1550)

At a subsequent meeting of the Standing Committee on Justice and Legal Affairs, the minister indicated that he had received the report and, after receiving it, realized that the report itself said the same things that had been said at the inquest and had come to the same conclusion. I might have missed something at the justice committee meeting, but at that time I am firmly convinced that the impression which the minister attempted to convey was that that was the end of it so far as he was concerned, that there was only the one report in his hands, and that there had only been the one group set up in his department to take a look at the whole matter.

We now find that that group was reconvened as a result of certain allegations that were made, and that the minister has only now received the second report from the same group, which is quite different from the misleading impression he had attempted to give.

This might be merely semantics, and perhaps the time of the House has been wasted by this because perhaps this is the usual conduct of the minister—I am not sure. In any event, I plead with the minister to take into account that the problem with which the House is faced at the moment, the problem which he has forced members on this side to bring to the attention of the House at this time, is solely and simply the result of attempting to hide things somewhere under the rug and keep them secret.

Quite frankly, we took the heat off the minister in the week after this tragedy because of his absolute commitment to this House that he would be releasing the initial report. The long and the short of it is simply this: he did not release that report to this day, which he should do because he gave that commitment. The only way we found out that the same group was reconvened and has now presented a second report is simply because some of the officials at Dorchester or in the department have leaked it to opposition members. This is the only way in which we can find out these things, and that is part of the continuing tragedy of Dorchester and part of the continuing tragedy of the whole correctional service organization so far as this government is concerned. I also say it is a personal tragedy so far as the minister is concerned because he does not live up to the commitments he gives to members of the House or members of the justice committee.

Madam Speaker: The minister has had a chance to reply to the hon. member for Burnaby (Mr. Robinson), but I suppose that had he known at the time that other hon. members would want to speak on this question, he would have reserved his comments and spoken later. I believe I have to give the minister a chance to reply, but now I see that other members are asking for the floor. Perhaps the minister would prefer to be recognized later. I think that would be much better for the Chair because then I will be able to hear what reply the minister makes to the statements.

I shall recognize the hon. member for Central Nova (Mr. MacKay), followed by the hon. member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce (Mr. Allmand), who insists on being heard on the second question of privilege, and then the minister will have the floor.

Hon. Elmer M. MacKay (Central Nova): Madam Speaker, my intervention will be very brief. I listened with a great deal of attention to what has been said so far, and I would just like to add another dimension, or make a suggestion to my friend, the minister. I shall be very interested to hear the comments which will be made by the hon. member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce (Mr. Allmand), the former solicitor general.

I want to suggest to the present Solicitor General (Mr. Kaplan) that there is ample precedent for making him very skeptical indeed of the quality of information which he receives from the RCMP. I do not know about penitentiary officials, but there is at least one precedent where the commissioner of the RCMP misinformed the hon. member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce when he was solicitor general. It is quite clear to me that the results of that particular bit of misinformation had some very tragic effects, which still exist to this day, on a number of members of the force and former members of the force.

I hope that when the minister is replying on this very serious matter he will tell the House whether he is still taking all of the information conveyed to him by the RCMP on blind acceptance because, if he is, he is much more foolish and naive than I think he should be.

Hon. Warren Allmand (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce): Madam Speaker, as a member of the Standing Committee on Justice and Legal Affairs and a former solicitor general, I had received many letters from inmates of Dorchester Penitentiary alleging provocation, harassment and cruelty on the part of some of the staff against certain inmates following the tragedy which took place. I must say that I was not surprised, because things like that had happened in the past, and, when investigated, were found to be true. I want to make clear that such allegations were not made against all staff, but some staff had been found guilty of such actions in the past, so it did not surprise me that it might take place again. Consequently, when this matter was raised before the justice committee, I also put several questions to the Solicitor General (Mr. Kaplan) about it. He replied to me in much the same way as he replied to the hon. member for Burnaby (Mr. Robinson),