

Oral Questions

My question for the Deputy Prime Minister is this: Does the Government recognize the serious implications of this case on freedom of the press and the people's right to know? Does the Government realize that by intimidating the press it is attacking the right of all Canadians to know?

An Hon. Member: Order, order!

• (1440)

Hon. Don Mazankowski (Deputy Prime Minister, President of the Privy Council and Minister of Agriculture): Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Member has expressed some obvious opinions which he has.

Let me say that as far as the Government of Canada is concerned, the freedom of the press is a very fundamental and basic right of all Canadians. This Government and this Party has, is and always will support the freedom of the press which is clearly enshrined in the Canadian Bill of Rights and the Charter of Rights. We certainly stand by that and if the Hon. Member is suggesting in his question that the Government is not supportive of that fundamental principle and right, I want to assure him that that is simply not the case. I hope the Opposition doesn't get carried away with its rhetoric and innuendo and carry it just a little too far, as has been the case here over the last week or so.

Mr. Harvard: Mr. Speaker, I just want to remind the House that Woodward and Bernstein were not charged in the Watergate affair. Neither were journalists who reported leaks of provincial Budgets in both Ontario and Quebec.

GOVERNMENT POLICY QUESTIONED

Mr. John Harvard (Winnipeg—St. James): Mr. Speaker, I have a supplementary question for the Deputy Prime Minister. Is big brother going to lock up journalists for doing their job? Is that government policy?

Hon. Don Mazankowski (Deputy Prime Minister, President of the Privy Council and Minister of Agriculture): Mr. Speaker, I would have hoped that the Hon. Member would have listened to my answer and then it would not have been necessary for him to read his supplementary.

CHARGES LAID BY RCMP—GOVERNMENT'S POSITION

Mr. Stan Keyes (Hamilton West): Mr. Speaker, just last November I was elected to this House, but for 16 years before that I was a television news reporter.

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Keyes: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Deputy Prime Minister. Given that journalists frequently come into possession of alleged secret government documents; given that never ever have their rights to publish that information been questioned by the possible laying of criminal charges—

Mr. Beatty: Tell that to the *Toronto Star*.

Mr. Keyes: —must the news media now seek an official government stamp of approval from this Government before it can report the news?

Mr. Beatty: Is your Leader still suing the *Toronto Sun*?

Mr. Turner (Vancouver Quadra): Yes, for libel.

Hon. Don Mazankowski (Deputy Prime Minister, President of the Privy Council and Minister of Agriculture): Mr. Speaker, I tried to make the position of the Government very clear. This matter is a matter for the courts to decide. I want to remind the Hon. Member that the charges were laid in this case by the RCMP after consulting and receiving advice from the law officers of the Attorney General's Branch of the Government of Ontario. I would assume that this matter will be dealt with in the normal course of events and through the judicial process and I have no intention of interfering.

Mr. Keyes: Mr. Speaker, he has no intention of interfering.

An Hon. Member: Right on.

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

An Hon. Member: That is the first reasonable thing they have said today.

Mr. Keyes: This is not a matter to be decided in the way of the response of the Deputy Prime Minister, that he is going to wait. This is a crucial matter, Mr. Speaker.