

Inquiries of the Ministry

Mr. Lewis: Third, it is a well-known habit of those who want to kill someone to produce discomfort for him.

Some hon. Members: Order!

Mr. Lewis: They amputate his arms and legs and then ask him to run. This government has amputated the Auditor General's office. It amputated the arms and legs by inadequate personnel. Now, we have this kind of statement.

I did not rise on this point during the question period because I did not want to take up any time in the question period. But I say it is less than courageous to attack an officer of this parliament in this House without giving details or considering the situation, and it is less than proper for the Prime Minister to say that members of parliament condone lawbreaking.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Trudeau: Mr. Speaker, I merely want to point out, without shouting if possible, that this matter was brought to the attention of the House by way of a question from a member of the opposition. The government had no intention of drawing this to the attention of the House. It did not bring this matter before the House.

When the question was asked of the government why this illegality was being perpetrated—those were the terms that were used; I cannot quote them exactly but in the question the matter of illegality was raised—I undertook to look into the matter. I reported that it was not any fault of the reporting minister but of the Auditor General himself that the report was not with us. I answered that it was not the intention of the government to look into the motives of the Auditor General or the reasons that he might want to give.

I did not want to make an issue of it, Mr. Speaker, but the question was pressed upon the government. I just said that the Auditor General is an officer of parliament, not of the government, and that he is answerable to this House. This government does not intend to introduce the resolution of censure which is recommended by the leader of the New Democratic Party.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Trudeau: If he has the courage of his convictions, perhaps he will want to move such a motion.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Speaker: I suggest to both the right hon. Prime Minister and the hon. member for York South that there is not much point in pursuing this matter by way of a debate on a question of privilege. The hon. member raised a question. As is the tradition and the long-established practice of the House, the person involved was allowed to reply. There is no motion before the House. There is nothing before the House. I called orders of the day before and I have to call orders of the day again.

Mr. Lewis: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a personal question of privilege. I respect Your Honour's desire, but the Prime

[Mr. Lewis.]

Minister was in the House when I spoke and I do not intend to let him get away with twisting my words.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member is now entering into a debate with the Prime Minister. The hon. member made a statement and the Prime Minister made a statement. The hon. member for York South now says that he does not want the Prime Minister to misinterpret his statement. This can go on for a long time because the Prime Minister will again reply. I wonder where it will end and whether we are achieving any purpose in pursuing this debate.

Mr. Lewis: I am in Your Honour's hands. If I believed, as the Prime Minister suggested he did, that the Auditor General, having the capacity to produce the report on time, was deliberately breaking the law, I would bring such a resolution. It is the Prime Minister who suggested he is breaking the law.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Lewis: It was the Prime Minister who suggested—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Lewis: It is up to him—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Lewis: I, for one, will not accept this kind of dishonest twisting of words.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. It seems we are continuing the debate between the Prime Minister and the hon. member for York South. I have no objection to allowing the Prime Minister to reply to what the hon. member calls his personal question of privilege, but it does not seem that this is a very profitable exercise as far as this House is concerned.

Mr. Trudeau: Mr. Speaker, I think there may be a solution to this. The matter of the Auditor General has been before a standing committee of the House for many months now. It can be brought back to this committee. The committee is chaired by a member of the Conservative party. I have no objection. On the contrary, I would be happy if this whole matter were once again tackled by that committee. As to twisting the words of the hon. member, Mr. Speaker, I assure you that I do not have to do that. His twisted mind does it for him.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. Orders of the day.