

Privilege—Mr. Jarvis

Mr. Woolliams: They cannot get any action by intimidating members of parliament, so now they are going to start to intimidate the Fourth Estate. If ever there was a question of privilege, it is surely high time that this whole matter was discussed in committee. Possibly we should reserve our right to move a special motion in that regard.

We then come to the point made by Your Honour. Throughout the time I have been in this House, I have always accepted the fact that a minister does not have to answer. I have always known that you can draw inferences just as you can draw inferences in law. When a minister dries up like a dry brook he has something to hide. I want to know what the minister and the government are hiding.

The Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. MacEachen): is today replacing the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) who has gone to western Canada, with or without the Minister of Transport (Mr. Lang). I say to him it is time that we got some answers and clarification. It is time for intimidation to be shelved. Is this merely an election gimmick to scare the opposition and frighten public opinion into thinking that maybe the opposition is doing something to the security of this nation? If there is anyone who should be concerned about security in this nation, it is the Liberal party and the Liberal government headed by the man who heads the party now as Prime Minister of this country.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Allan J. MacEachen (Deputy Prime Minister and President of Privy Council): Mr. Speaker, I regret the necessity of participating in a series of questions of privilege that have been raised almost every day. I had been planning today, yesterday, and earlier to raise points of order, because it is obvious that, through the guise of questions of privilege, debates are being held on subjects that are not before the House. However, I did not raise a point of order because if that were done, even though I regard this practice as being a very bad one, it would obviously draw the charge that we were attempting to close off debate.

I want to make it clear that in my view there is not a valid question of privilege before the House. There has not been. The Speaker has consistently ruled that these are not prima facie questions of privilege. Almost every day he is obliged to make a new ruling, restating his same decision. That is the historical fact.

I just wonder whether members are going to continue using this vehicle of privilege. If they do, when a true question of privilege arises, and that is a rare event, it will be of not much use.

Today the Solicitor General (Mr. Blais) declined to answer specifically certain questions which had been asked by the opposition relating to security. It is very obvious that if the Solicitor General had provided to the House of Commons the information requested with regard to the number of copies of sensitive security documents that were in circulation, where they were to be found, either in government departments or in the security service, that information would be of some value

[Mr. Woolliams.]

to persons and agents who may have an interest in penetrating the security service of Canada.

It seemed to be a very obvious refusal, to decline to add to the information that other countries might want to have about our security system. I thought it was a legitimate approach to have been taken by the Solicitor General. I think it would be of very great use to other countries to have this kind of information made available in the way that has been requested.

Quite apart from the security situation, the Solicitor General was entitled to answer, and I believe he would have answered as ministers generally do, except when there is some good reason. In this case it is a matter of judgment. There is a good explanation for the way the Solicitor General exercised his judgment.

References have been made in this debate by the hon. member for Grenville-Carleton (Mr. Baker) and the hon. member for Calgary North (Mr. Woolliams) to the fact that investigatory steps have been taken and possibly they were in the direction of a member of parliament, I think that both raised that point, and directed against the members of the media in the way of search warrants.

I remind the House that not so long ago allegations were made in the *Globe and Mail* with respect to the hon. member for Bonavista-Trinity-Conception (Mr. Rooney). The privileges of that member are as great as those of the hon. member for Leeds (Mr. Cossitt). It was alleged that the hon. member had violated a statute. The Speaker ordered an investigation. Subsequently a search warrant was issued, and the hon. member was charged. It was a regrettable occurrence, as any one of us regrets when any other hon. member finds himself in any difficulty of any kind. I apply that same view to the hon. member for Leeds.

The treatment given to the hon. member for Bonavista-Trinity-Conception, however regrettable, demonstrated a very valid principle, that no member of parliament is above the law.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

● (1542)

Mr. MacEachen: There has been a great deal said in this debate and in earlier debates about privilege. I agree there are privileges inherent in the office of member of parliament, some of which, as has been said, are outdated. Anyone who wishes to examine the Sandys case, as I have attempted to do, will find there were privileges asserted in that report which have fallen, and properly so, into disuse.

There is privilege. It ought not to be exaggerated, though, and members of parliament ought not to be giving the impression that in some way they can breach the law in a fashion which is not open to the ordinary citizen of this country.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. MacEachen: The people of Canada are watching to see how the hon. member for Leeds is going to be treated. Many of them are saying, "If I were suspected of having breached