

*Oral Questions*

However, the Member from Annapolis Valley is not the only one with a distaste for press harassment, for disagreement exists within the Prime Minister's Cabinet as well. In 1983, the present Minister of National Health and Welfare made the following remarks in defence of freedom of the press after the RCMP charged *The Toronto Sun* under the Official Secrets Act:

The Government has made an attack on the basic freedoms of Canadians—In no area is that more conspicuous than in the case of freedom of the press in Canada—Lip service is paid to the right of freedom of speech. Lip service is paid to the right to a free press. Indeed, the two are inseparable. In many ways what this Government has done is to attack one of the most basic liberties of Canadians, one of the most essential rights any Canadian must have if our democracy is to survive and flourish.

In view of these remarks I call on the Government to clarify its position concerning freedom of the press in Canada.

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## ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

[English]

### THE BUDGET

#### POSITION OF COMMISSIONER OF RCMP

**Hon. Bob Kaplan (York Centre):** Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Prime Minister. Ever since the charges were laid in connection with the budget leaks, the Government has been distancing itself from political responsibility for these charges by saying that the legal advice to the RCMP came from the Department of the Attorney General of Ontario.

This morning we learned from the Commissioner of the RCMP himself that advice came also from Doug Rutherford, a senior federal Department of Justice official. Why did the Prime Minister and the Solicitor General give us only half-truths about these facts?

**Hon. Doug Lewis (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada):** Mr. Speaker, I wish to advise my hon. friend that any discussions between the RCMP and officials of my Department were under the normal course of events during the normal investigation of the matter.

#### POSITION OF SOLICITOR GENERAL

**Hon. Bob Kaplan (York Centre):** Mr. Speaker, we learned as well this morning information about an important point that the Government has been making to excuse itself from telling the Canadian people about the Mutual Life leak for 28 days. The Solicitor General himself confirmed that the RCMP had never asked the Government to keep secret the fact of the second and much more serious leak.

My supplementary question is directed to the Prime Minister. Is it not a fact that the real reason for keeping that information secret was that if it had been made public it would have destroyed the Minister of Finance's Budget?

[Translation]

**Hon. Pierre Blais (Solicitor General of Canada and Minister of State (Agriculture)):** Mr. Speaker, I must unfortunately make a slight correction to what my hon. colleague said, because I was there this morning, I appeared before the Justice Committee. I clearly stated that if this notification had not come from the RCMP—I did not ask for notification because automatically, when a police investigation is begun by the RCMP, the day before the events that happened on television, a police investigation, a criminal investigation was already under way, and we did not need notification from anyone that all information received should be turned over to the RCMP so that it could conduct a full and complete investigation of the events.

#### CHARGES—GOVERNMENT POSITION

**Hon. Bob Kaplan (York Centre):** Mr. Speaker, nevertheless, the answer from the RCMP Commissioner was no. He did not ask the Government for that.

I would therefore like to ask the Prime Minister the following question: The Royal Canadian Mounted Police were able to charge Doug Small, although all Canadians knew that he was the one who had leaked the Budget on television.

How can the Government have us believe that if the general public had also been aware of the Mutual Life leak, it would have made it difficult to charge other individuals?

• (1420)

[English]

**Hon. Doug Lewis (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada):** Mr. Speaker, my hon. friend has