

● (1512)

[Translation]

As soon as I learned last Monday that what I had said was controversial, my office phoned the students at Carleton for a copy of the tapes made in front of me. The students informed us that one of those tapes had been erased and that, in the case of the other, the recorder had not worked. I therefore pursued the matter as best I could remember until I learned late yesterday that the commentator in question had tapes which he had given the media. We then asked the commentator if he would agree to letting me hear copy of the tape, which he refused to do.

I should add that this morning, following the many statements made by Carleton students over the station Radio-Carleton, the commentator called my office offering the tape which he said was not complete. It reached us barely a few hours ago and I have yet to hear it.

[English]

Further, Mr. Speaker, it is rather surprising that the tape, made eight days ago, would be used only now for three quotes out of context heavily biased by commentary, and reproduced for the first time, I think, by the CBC with only one excerpt. It is easy to see how such techniques make a mouse look like an elephant, and no professional journalist would do that.

This whole operation tended to discredit the judgment of the students present at the Roosters discussions who did not interpret my opinions and my remarks in any such distorted way.

[Translation]

The shame of the matter, Mr. Speaker, if I may say so, is that none of the participants in that operation dealt with the problem I was discussing, namely the relations that must exist between the government and the police in charge of national security in democratic countries. Instead, the leader of the New Democratic Party (Mr. Broadbent) tried to stir up trouble between friends and colleagues of the cabinet. He should know that this old trick does not work.

There was a time when many of us who do not share the philosophy of the New Democratic Party still recognized that the leaders of that party—the hon. member for Nanaimo-Cowichan-The Islands (Mr. Douglas) or their former leader, Mr. Lewis—had accustomed this House and this country to a standard of honesty which won them votes if not personal admiration. If this feeling remains true for some hon. members, unfortunately I cannot say so for their present leader.

[English]

Mr. Joe Clark (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, I do not intend to take a great deal of time intervening in this debate on the question of privilege raised by the minister. I must say that I very much regret having to be involved in the debate at all, but I think there have been some statements by the minister which raise very real questions about the policy of the Government of Canada, who speaks for the government, and what is the precise attitude of the government.

Privilege—Miss Bégin

It would be perhaps helpful, sir, to read into the record briefly some of the things in the transcript of the recording of the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Miss Bégin). She said at one point, referring to the Solicitor General (Mr. Fox):

—I think Francis Fox should clearly state—give the message—that he disagrees with what the police did. More than defending them or explaining that they might have had good reason.

Sir, I leave it to readers of the records as to whether or not—

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Clark: Mr. Speaker, I am asked by one of the defenders on the other side whether I can prove that this is precisely what the minister said. If the minister believes it is not what she said, then of course it is within her rights to stand up and let that be known. Until the minister does take that position we must assume that the words are her words.

An hon. Member: You should have listened to her.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Clark: I would like to leave to the readers of the record the final conclusion, Sir, as to whether these statements by the Minister of National Health and Welfare, indicating that the Solicitor General should follow a course other than the course he followed, constitutes a disagreement that is serious between ministers.

Perhaps of greater consequence to me are other aspects in the statements by the minister, a member of the cabinet. One of these relates to the RCMP and the relation of that force to the Government of Canada, and the other relates to a question of the climate that prevailed in Canada at the time of certain acts which we now know to be illegal.

Let me deal first with the question relating to the relationship of the RCMP to the government. Perhaps the best way I can deal with this, and it raises the question I tried to put to the Acting Prime Minister (Mr. Munro) earlier, as to whether he was speaking on behalf of the government, as did my colleague, the hon. member for Kingston and the Islands (Miss MacDonald), is to quote the minister.

In relation to the RCMP the minister said, and I will read the entirety of the quotation, and perhaps I should say it will be clear from the quotation that the minister was speaking without notes and was not reading from a direct text:

—they have gadgets of national security, of surveillance, so big that they, if you, the government, start trying to control them or master what goes on or look into the files—you know, say you, the Minister sets a meeting of the directors and wants to see files and all that he doesn't know—and none of us know—what's the next step because they can be using—that's my feeling—they can be using gadgets the way they want.

At this point I would emphasize that the word "they" refers to the RCMP. The minister said:

—that's my feeling—they can be using gadgets the way they want. They can be bugging you.