

Privilege—Mr. Nielsen

Mr. Nielsen: My deeper regret is that in the past few days the attention of this House has recalled this period and in so doing has prevented the House from dealing with the more crucial issues which are and ought to be before us—

Ms. Copps: Oh, come on. Get off the editorializing. A bunch of cowards.

Mr. Nielsen: Job creation, parliamentary reform, international trade—these are the issues for which I would like this Parliament to be remembered. I pledge to you, Sir, and to all Hon. Members that I am determined that my contribution to this House and the people of Canada will be to move forward on these important issues and not to recall or indeed return Parliament to the partisan bondage of the sixties.

It is my hope that my reflections today can lead us all in this pursuit.

Some Hon. Members: Hear hear!

Mr. Speaker: There has been no question of privilege raised.

Ms. Copps: Well, why didn't you say that before?

Some Hon. Members: Oh, Sheila!

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. On a point of order, the Right Hon. Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Turner).

Mr. Turner (Vancouver Quadra): Mr. Speaker, are you going to allow me, and perhaps the House Leader for the NDP, to respond to the statement?

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

● (1110)

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. I think everybody will know that I want to treat this as fairly as possible. I think, in fact, what we have heard is not a question of privilege but a statement by the Minister. I therefore propose to hear the Right Hon. Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Turner), I take it for his Party, and the Hon. Member for Hamilton Mountain (Mr. Deans) for his Party.

Right Hon. John N. Turner (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, we will, of course, want to analyse the words of the Deputy Prime Minister clearly to ascertain from those words whether that constitutes an apology. I want to draw to his attention, that the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) and to the House, the fact that we find great difficulty in accepting the description of what the Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. Nielsen) termed happenstance. It was clear from the tape, which is now in the public record, that the eavesdropping of the proceedings of the Liberal caucus was more than happenstance, whether or not it was initiated by the Deputy Prime Minister. His own words indicate that eavesdropping was repeated and regular. I just wish to recite to Your Honour the words that fell from the mouth of the Deputy Prime Minister as recorded in the tape. He said:

From here on in, this part is not for current publication. You can keep it and stare at it but you cannot disclose it. There was a method by which we knew every Wednesday what was said in the Liberal caucus word for bloody word.

He went on later to say:

I could scarcely believe what I was hearing and I was hearing every word that was spoken. He was speaking in French and I had the benefit of a translation service as well.

Later:

It is verbatim because I heard every word in that caucus, every single word. There are others who heard because I had to have somebody around.

Now, Mr. Speaker, that is more than happenstance. That reflects a regular style of conduct, and one which in those days, 20 years ago, and today remains unethical, unparliamentary, and as I stated on Friday, Your Honour, it transgress and offends the rights and privileges of Members of this House.

Of course, since 1974 the Parliament of our country has attached a criminal sanction to that type of conduct, whether the contact is initiated or abetted. I suggest to the Deputy Prime Minister that, at best, he was participating and abetting in that style of conduct. He himself, in this House on another occasion, but on the same type of subject, on October 17, 1973, and it is found at page 6942 of Hansard, said this:

I do not think it is enough that the House simply ordered the tape to be produced by the offender. The offence is serious enough to require the offender to come before the bar of the House and give an explanation of the whole affair.

This was the Deputy Prime Minister speaking when he was, and still is, the Member for Yukon. He went on to say:

It is an extremely serious affair and one that should be considered very seriously by the Chair. My suggestion is that Your Honour consider the advisability of having the offender appear before the bar of the House to explain the origin of the idea, the manner in which he accomplished his objective and, indeed, all of the details of the rather sordid action.

If the action was sordid when the Member from the Yukon, as he then was, was attributing it to another Member, then it remains sordid today.

Whether it was 20 or 25 years ago, the relevance today is the relevance we tried to bring up on Thursday and Friday, Mr. Speaker, whether that type of conduct, considered to be, I think by most fair minded people in this country, unethical, to be unprofessional, and which today is illegal, can be tolerated or condoned by the Prime Minister by retaining the Deputy Prime Minister as the number two person in his Government.

That is not the way in which the Prime Minister has been treating the matter. In Halifax over the weekend he said that eavesdropping is only human. He likened it to passing an open door and listening to a conversation. That is not what happened. This was deliberate, repeated and regular conduct.

Then we have the Minister of Justice (Mr. Crosbie), of all people—he who has the custody of the administration of the laws of this country—saying over the weekend on CTV, “So as to whether I” the Minister of Justice, John Crosbie, “would listen, if by accident the opportunity arose today, to another Party’s caucus or whatever, yes, I would”.

Some Hon. Members: Shame! Shame!