

Privilege

statement by Superintendent Bentham of the RCMP in which he summarized a conversation he had with me a few days ago. It is quite true that I had a conversation with him. The statement was accurate with the exception of one point. I think this is a very serious interference with the privileges of members of parliament. I am paraphrasing again. Superintendent Bentham reported to the Solicitor General and his superiors that I asked him whether he was recording or bugging our conversation, and that he replied yes. I must tell the House that that is an absolute falsehood. I did ask him whether he was bugging or recording our conversation, and he replied "no". He said, "If you mean am I making notes of what you are saying, yes I am. Do you mind?" I said, "No, of course not".

However, the report he handed to his superiors—which I saw with my own eyes because it was handed to me by the Solicitor General—said that Superintendent Bentham had said that my telephone call and the words I was using were being recorded, presumably by some form of recording device. I questioned General Dare about this, and he said it was a matter of terminology. I think it is much more than just a matter of terminology.

The main point I am trying to bring out is that I feel that any Canadian has the right to legal advice. I am saying that in effect this was denied to me. General Dare and the Solicitor General said they would retire to the corridor for a few moments, consult, and return, which they did.

We discussed what would happen to these documents. I said I would undertake absolutely not to show them to anyone between now and Monday, not to discuss them further, nor to raise them in the House of Commons. I told them that on Monday we could meet after I had time to think it over, to consult my solicitor and to consult the leader of my party. I said that I could then give an answer. When they left my office I was left with the distinct impression that that request was being granted. They more or less departed not saying absolutely "yes", but certainly not telling me that anything would be done to me.

● (1512)

At 1:15 p.m. in the dining room of the House of Commons today I was telephoned by the Solicitor General and advised in a very friendly way—but I am not sure just how friendly the motive of the person behind him was—that I had until four o'clock this afternoon and that he was sorry but it had to be four o'clock this afternoon, or he would have to exercise one of his options. I asked him which option he was going to exercise, and he said he would not go any further at that time. I had seen the options, of course, so I knew it had to be one of the three or four or five that I had seen.

Shortly before the House met at two o'clock I had an opportunity to discuss this matter with the Leader of the Progressive Conservative party. After I had outlined to him what had happened, he advised me that he had been telephoned or contacted, I am not sure which, by the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) this morning and asked if he would

[Mr. Cossitt.]

come to the Prime Minister's office. The Prime Minister in effect told him roughly what was going to happen which, of course, subsequently did happen.

I do not choose to go into further details of what the Prime Minister said to the Leader of the Opposition or what the Leader of the Opposition said to the Prime Minister. That perhaps has no bearing on my question of privilege, other than to say that the Prime Minister, in my opinion, was using his office as Prime Minister to put pressure on the Solicitor General to take care of me and deny my rights in this House.

I think that is a fundamental breach of the privileges of any member of the House of Commons, Mr. Speaker. I am frankly surprised, very surprised, that the Prime Minister of this country should be so vindictive with a member of the opposition that he would go as far as contacting the leader of this party on a matter of this nature and, when that did not work, go to the Solicitor General and tell him to do what he did subsequently, namely, deny me the right to consult counsel.

Mr. Speaker, how could I, between the time I left the parliamentary dining room and came to this House at two o'clock, have any chance to contact my solicitor, who does not live in the city of Ottawa, have legal advice given to me, and then discuss the matter further with the Solicitor General at four o'clock this afternoon? How could I possibly do it?

So, Mr. Speaker, I ask you, as protector of the rights of members of this House, if I do not have the right to be given the time to consult my solicitor about what should be done in this case? Are my privileges being interfered with or denied by what this government has done?

I say to the Prime Minister of this country, who is probably far more responsible for what has happened today than the Solicitor General, that he has seen a chance, so he thinks, to "get" the member for Leeds. Believe me, sir, he will not get that chance because every person in this country has a right to counsel—me, yourself, sir, the Prime Minister, or anyone walking the streets of this country. Any government that tries to deny those rights, that tries to deny the privileges of a citizen of this country to consult his lawyer, I think is far more guilty than anyone who might be charged with anything. I think it is a very, very serious matter.

There is little I can add, Mr. Speaker. I think I have made it clear that the document shown to me proved beyond the shadow of a doubt that everything I have said in this House is true, because it said so. It also has proved as a result that the Prime Minister has attempted to use his position to put the—what would I call it—the muzzle on me as a member of parliament, through one of his cabinet ministers. It interferes with my privileges. I think it is one of the most serious things that could have occurred, and I ask that I be allowed to reserve the right to move a motion at some subsequent point to have this matter dealt with further.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. J.-J. Blais (Solicitor General): Mr. Speaker, first of all I would indicate to the hon. gentleman and the House that