

Privilege—Mr. Goyer

tions. On the one hand, the minister said last December that he could not recall if he learned of the break-in after and today in the House—

Mr. MacFarlane: That is what the article says.

Mr. Broadbent: That is perfectly true, that is what the article says. The reporter, with whom I have checked, said that he has checked his notes.

Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton): You are not the minister, Gus.

Mr. Broadbent: I am being serious about the event, and I hope hon. members opposite are being equally serious. I am just putting that on the record—

Mr. MacFarlane: Put the truth on the record, then.

Mr. Broadbent: I have a concern about the truth of the matter. The second point raised by the minister concerns his own responsibility. There is no question of veracity of statement here, but there is a very basic question of exercising his responsibility as a minister at the time. With reference to that meeting of November 6, he said that he did not put the explicit question to Mr. Higgitt or Mr. Starnes—were the RCMP, or were they not, involved in the break-in? He gave two reasons, as I recall. One was that the question had already been dealt with publicly by the former minister of justice, Mr. Choquette, and Mr. Choquette had already denied that there was police involvement. That is not very persuasive, because Mr. Choquette has to get his information from the police force and the police were passing on testimony about their own behaviour. That was not sufficient grounds for not posing the question. Second, he referred to the general respect he had for the RCMP which led him not to pose that question directly. In terms of his exercising his ministerial responsibilities—

Mr. MacEachen: How about some questions, instead of long speeches?

Mr. Clark: You cannot take the heat, Allan.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. I brought the hon. Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Clark) somewhat to order at the initial stage of this to indicate that we are here on a rather extraordinary procedure. We have a situation where the minister has raised this matter by way of a question of privilege and has agreed to answer some questions. There is no argument about the question of privilege because there is no motion attached to it. I can only allow to a limited extent, as I have tried to do, the hon. Leader of the Opposition to expose very briefly the line of questioning he might follow. I am attempting to do the same thing with the hon. member for Oshawa-Whitby (Mr. Broadbent).

I do not think we are into a situation where contributions can be made by both sides of the House on the alleged matter of privilege, because there is no matter of privilege. There are questions available, and I should extend to each party what I have extended—an opportunity to make a very brief statement

[Mr. Broadbent.]

and then get on to the questioning. That is how it should be governed.

Mr. Broadbent: Mr. Speaker, I respect that, but I am sure you recognize that the minister has made a statement on this important matter and the rest of us made accusations either directly or indirectly and want to deal directly with the matter now. I do not find the minister's explanation acceptable. I am referring to his explanation for not putting the question directly to Mr. Higgitt and Mr. Starnes at the time. We know from the press at the time that he knew the RCMP was monitoring this group and was watching their activities. In the same newspaper article he is quoted as saying: "We were watching this group". Once the serious accusation had been made by the group, that the police had been involved in the break-in, or queries were put to the minister implying that they were, there was an elementary responsibility on his part to put the question at that meeting before he replied to the letter—did you or did you not take part in the break-in? I conclude that point with that observation. He was negligent in his responsibility.

Finally, my third point is that there was indeed a conspiracy involved in this operation on the side of the RCMP. I do not hesitate in saying that. Mr. Starnes and Mr. Higgitt met with the former minister to discuss a letter which asked questions about RCMP involvement, and they did not have the courtesy or integrity to bring to the minister's attention what they knew at the time. That was a clear neglect of their responsibilities. Any meaning of the word "conspiracy" in this activity applies directly to the top level of the RCMP. That has been confirmed here today in the minister's statement.

[Translation]

Mr. Lambert (Bellechasse): Mr. Speaker, I am never very happy to take part in discussions which could create some doubt among the public about the sincerity of a minister or a member of parliament. This is always truly disagreeable, but when you have to do your duty, you must do so with courage and try to throw some light on the matter and give justice to those who deserve it. I recognize that it is impossible from a human point of view to do so because God is the only judge since He knows everything.

In any case, the minister said earlier in his statement that he agreed with the statement made by the Solicitor General of Canada (Mr. Fox) on Friday, June 17, 1977. He even went further and stated that he was willing to put his seat on the line, which is a formidable challenge to the accuser who provoked him more directly.

Mr. Speaker, I have often witnessed such challenges, but not in the House of Commons. I have seen challenges of this type during the Taschereau administration in the province of Quebec. This was during the debates on public accounts, and three, four or five times a day, someone made this challenge: Put your seat on the line if you want to prove such or such a thing! No member ever lost his seat because of this and no one ever followed up these charges.

I seriously believe that this will not solve the problem. I am greatly concerned about this, Mr. Speaker, and I would like to