

Privilege—Mr. Jarvis

first unfolded we found out that there was alleged to have been a leak of some kind which caused the Solicitor General, in the company of the head of the security service of the country, to take the unprecedented step of visiting a member of parliament. I leave to Your Honour's imagination the atmosphere of that visit.

Mr. Blais: A very friendly atmosphere. Ask the hon. member for Leeds (Mr. Cossitt).

Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton): The next step was a debate in this House. It was a crisis debate. That is how one would have to describe it if one were not a member here. Yesterday there were raids, with warrants, on two television stations in this city, involving a leaked document. Surely if the government is to be believed at all, this matter must be extremely serious and, of course, secret. I do not have to mention the fact that a whole host of allegations have been published in newspapers, and all the rest of it. As a result there is a threat of prosecution in the courts of a member of this House for a violation of the Official Secrets Act. I think that is a pretty serious thing.

● (1522)

Now, sir, we have a report that the Solicitor General refuses to confirm or deny in the House of Commons today that there are 58 copies of that document on the loose somewhere, a monstrous leak if the document is an important one. Mr. Speaker, I think we are beginning to doubt the extent and the nature, and the depth of concern there ought to be in terms of the security leak in view of the fact that in this city there are 58 of these copies. The question that was put by the hon. member for Perth-Wilmot (Mr. Jarvis) was not on the merits, not on the contents, of any documents. The question was put as to whether or not there was this broad distribution. It was a very simple question. That is all there was. It did not elicit an answer that could damage national security, but if the answer to the question were yes, the answer would damage the security of the government and its credibility in this whole issue. I have the suspicion that that is the reason the refusal was given. I am sorry to have to say that, but it is just beyond belief that all of these investigations could occur when there is alleged to be 58 documents loose in this city. I cannot believe that the Royal Canadian Mounted Police would do that. I cannot believe that the security service of the country could be so negligent, but I can believe that the Government of Canada could be so negligent and the Solicitor General be so negligent—

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton): —if, indeed, the document is as important as has been stated.

Now, sir, getting to the heart of the motion and dealing with the obligation of the minister—

Mr. Speaker: Are the motions earlier referred to, the motions to which the hon. member is referring?

[Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton).]

Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton): Yes, sir. It is the motion referred to again by the hon. member for Perth-Wilmot (Mr. Jarvis).

Your Honour said some very important things on that day about the obligation of a minister, and I want to recite them for the record. I am looking at page 2567 of *Hansard*. You said this, and I quote:

In the final analysis, the most serious practical difficulty we have to face is the matter of the executive accountability to parliament. We are dealing with a matter which is fundamental to the whole question period, and the question period, as I have said publicly many times, is a source of great pride to the Canadian parliament. In my opinion the question period here is a session of daily accountability, which is an absolutely paramount feature of the Canadian parliamentary life.

I would be the first to say, sir, that if a question is put as to content of a document of the nature that it is alleged this document is, the minister is justified in saying no. That is one thing. It is quite another thing, sir, to refuse to answer a question not relating to the content, but relating to whether or not 58 copies of that document exist somewhere in the city. You went on to say, sir:

Therefore, in the final analysis, the Chair is not in a position to compel an answer—

That is true. Then you went on to say:

However, that does not diminish the importance of this exercise and the importance of the theory of ministerial responsibility, which makes the question period work on a daily basis in the Canadian parliament. Therefore, we are dealing with something which is fundamental to the most important aspect of our Canadian parliamentary system.

And further on you said:

The way for the House to find out what the Solicitor General is going to do in response to questions is to proceed to the question period and ask him questions.

We have done that, sir. You put him on probation, and today we found that he breached his probation. You went on to say:

On the other hand, I think it would be disrespectful of a very serious argument and of the very serious position put forward by the opposition which is fundamental, simply to push these motions aside.

You then went on to propose that the motion stand aside to see what happens over the next few days.

Sir, a member of parliament is in danger of being charged. If he is charged, there is a matter before the court. It is germane and important to the consideration in this House of the propriety of the minister's actions as a minister here in the House in answering questions, and of the minister's actions outside the House, for us to have the answer to the question of whether or not this document is so unimportant that it could be photostated and distributed through government departments, and re-photostated and distributed again. That is the question we have to ask ourselves. Or did the Solicitor General overreact in the circumstances, and is there a necessity for the raids on television stations, for subjecting a member of parliament to a possible charge, in this specific case, to interrogating newsmen, and all of the other things that have gone on? Sir, you put the minister on probation. I think the time has come now to answer the very simple and direct question put by the