

officials responsible were concerned. The hon. member for Northumberland-Durham, in his questions today, was getting right to the root of an aspect of ministerial responsibility. He was trying to find out whether the minister, on his own initiative, had determined in his own department what level of official was responsible for misinforming him. Of course, we never did get an answer to that question.

The point I am making is that, having misinformed the House—at least on June 17, and I am sure, subsequent to that as well—he should have taken corrective action in his department. He should have come back to the House and said, “Yes, indeed, there is misinformation.” We are assuming he did not lie to the House when he provided this information; it was presumably provided to him by others. His serious obligation as a Minister of the Crown was to have taken punitive and corrective action.

He should have been able to say to the House of Commons that “X” or “Y” individuals were responsible for misinforming him or not ensuring that he got the information he required as minister in order to exercise his responsibility. It was not done, and therefore that person was going to be subject to this kind of corrective action by him—dismissal, or what have you. He should have been able to say, “I, as minister, am now exercising control over this department.” His failure to do so, Mr. Speaker, gives rise to my question of privilege as it pertains to its effect on the House.

It is more than two weeks ago since the hon. gentleman first got up in the House—two weeks ago Friday—and talked about the one new event, then, of criminal wrongdoing. We have been totally preoccupied in the House with allegations of criminal wrongdoing or actual instances of criminal wrongdoing by the RCMP. The responsibility for this, as members of the opposition parties have been saying day after day, does not rest primarily with the vast majority of members of the RCMP who are law-abiding; the responsibility lies on the other side of the House, with that minister.

An hon. Member: Right on.

Mr. Broadbent: The minister's failure to take corrective action has entailed us day after day in having to deal with the mess in his own department, and therefore we are not able to exercise our functions in other—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am prepared to extend reasonable leniency to the development of any argument advanced by any hon. member, and I am prepared to hear the hon. member to determine whether or not there is some establishment of a question of privilege. But as for criticism that the conduct of a minister or, particularly, indication that any minister or any legislative program or any argument before the House which keeps the House occupied prevents it from doing other business, regardless of what can be said about the nature of that argument, one thing can certainly be said: it does not constitute a question of privilege.

Mr. Broadbent: I will leave that point and go on to another aspect of the question, leaving it to others, perhaps, to make

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the case that failure to accept responsibility, as practised in the Canadian Parliament and other parliaments where the system exists, has indeed resulted in our failure to perform our function as members of parliament, which entails an obligation to deal with other matters. I want to switch, now, to an even more basic consideration. Closely related to this sad affair of RCMP criminal wrongdoing or allegations of criminal wrongdoing is our responsibility as lawmakers and our related obligations to uphold the principle of the rule of law, which has been seriously impinged upon by a variety of ministers of the Crown, including the Prime Minister himself.

Last week and over the weekend the Solicitor General and the Minister of Justice each in his own irresponsible and rhetorical way have managed to convey to Canadians the idea that breaking the law is quite all right as long as you believe your purposes are worthy. This is precisely the perverse form of moral reasoning used by the very terrorist groups which the minister wants stamped out. These terrorist groups claim that their violence and illegal means are justified by the nobility of their final goal. That is the logic of a variety of arguments recently put forward by the Solicitor General, the Minister of Justice—ironically—and by the Prime Minister.

I say that a democracy which rejects illegal violence and terrorist groups cannot accept illegal terror in its police force. Nor can we respect a government which desires to convey to the public of Canada that a police force can do what it will as long as its objectives are good.

While the Solicitor General and the Minister of Justice have made statements which are disturbing, that made by the Prime Minister last Wednesday in Halifax is the most distressing of all. It was reported last Thursday morning that on Wednesday in Halifax the Prime Minister, when informed of a radio broadcast which was describing the current reaction in Quebec to information about the illegal burning of a barn—the information conveyed about the program was that the majority of the people who phoned in said they agreed with that act—the newscast I heard in my hotel room in Toronto was that the Prime Minister, when he was asked about that program, did not respond as he indicated he did today, but he said he agreed with that illegal act, and—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member is criticizing the conduct of ministers. I do not want to short-circuit that course of conduct. However, he is doing so on the basis of a question of privilege.

The question of privilege is a very narrow vehicle, as we have seen many times in the past. It has very rigid limits. If I am to permit general criticism of the conduct of ministers under the guise of privilege, I am sure I shall be asked to hear five or six of them every day at three o'clock. I have to recognize the hon. member's right to the floor on a serious matter of which he has given me notice. But just last week argument was advanced, during the course of the question of privilege I have just dealt with, that the Prime Minister in his intervention was using quotations from remarks made by the hon. member for Central Nova outside the House.