

Privilege—Mr. Baldwin

by suggesting—and I think he is right in his interpretation of the law—that anyone engaged in such conduct is in breach of the criminal law of this country. As matters now stand, every member of the opposition is now suspected of having committed an offence against the Criminal Code in the planting of this device.

If this were simply said in the heat of debate, we understand what happens in this House, and if the Prime Minister wants to come back and withdraw that charge, that is fine. But it is a charge of such considerable consequence that I would be inclined, if Your Honour decides there is a prima facie case, to make a motion referring it to a committee. The Prime Minister is not here now, and he may want to deal with it. We shall not be sitting tonight. Your Honour may wish to take it under advisement. But I cannot leave it as it stands without making it quite plain that I do not intend to sit here quietly and be charged by the right hon. gentleman with the commission of a criminal offence, unless he is prepared to make a formal charge. If not, he must be prepared to withdraw.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Jean Chrétien (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, I should like to say a few words on this question of privilege, because our privileges are affected every day in the House. In the last four days we have been repeatedly charged with cover-up, meddling and using the police for political purposes. This was the daily bread of members on the other side of the House. They have made all sorts of accusations against us and against other people who are serving the country.

The Prime Minister said that this bugging of the office of one of the MPs looks phony. There are a lot of people who think like that; I think like that, too, Mr. Speaker. If, as members of the government, we were to get up every time a member of the opposition imputes motives and bad actions to members of the administration, we would have no time to spend on other matters but would be occupied all the time with questions of privilege. If hon. members over there cannot stand the heat, they should not be in the House of Commons.

Mr. Joe Clark (Leader of the Opposition): One brief intervention. The Minister of Finance has done his best to evade the issue. The issue is that the Prime Minister has today charged members of this party with an illegal act.

Some hon. Members: No.

Mr. Clark: If the Prime Minister believes that, let him come to the House of Commons and either submit his evidence, or withdraw. Let him not make such a charge and then run away to a press conference.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Elmer M. MacKay (Central Nova): Mr. Speaker, in the interest of bringing a little reason into this, I just want to go on record as saying that I fully agree with the interpretation which the chief law enforcement officer of Canada has given us in the House this afternoon. As far as I am concerned, this

[Mr. Baldwin.]

situation does, after Your Honour has dealt with it fully according to your own dispositions and feelings as the man most qualified to protect the rights of all of us, go beyond the rights and privileges of members of parliament. It is a serious act, as the Minister of Justice has said, and I want it on the record that I agree with the way he has put it forward up to this point.

Hon. Otto E. Lang (Minister of Transport): Mr. Speaker, on the same question of privilege, since the hon. member for Peace River has invited you to examine the record and think about this, may I express the hope that you will do, at the same time, what was implicit in the suggestion of the Minister of Finance, that is, look back over the blues of perhaps the last several weeks and determine the number of occasions on which the official opposition, particularly,—the Conservative party—has, without any evidence at all, impugned people on this side of the House, impugned people outside the House and impugned the RCMP, totally on the basis of hearsay, and sometimes not even on that.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Walter Baker (Grenville-Carleton): Mr. Speaker, it has long been a tradition of this House—I know the Minister of Transport is ever aware of it and alert, on a daily basis, as is the Minister of Finance—that when members feel their honour has been impugned, or that a false accusation has been made, they rise then and there—

An hon. Member: Or they sue.

Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton): Or they sue, as the Minister of Transport has done, or they say, “Put your seat on the line”. We haven’t heard that for the last week or so in the House of Commons, so it seems to me we are coming awfully close to the truth.

The one thing that does worry me, however, about this whole thing is the irresponsible way in which the government has dallied and bandied with the good name of the RCMP.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton): There are a lot of officers in Canada who walk the streets and do police work.

Mr. Blais: And you are destroying them.

Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton): The government has failed to distinguish between the very small number in the security and intelligence group and the balance of the RCMP. I would think that, as a former dean of law and as a former minister of justice—

Mr. Gillies: Make a charge. Put your seat on the line. Stand up.

● (1532)

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. On application of the Leader of the Opposition, supported by the leader of the New Democrat-