

RCMP

The hon. member for Niagara Falls (Mr. Young) asked in a humorous fashion whether the Solicitor General (Mr. Fox) should have knowledge of any matter undertaken by any agent or agency under his control. He expected me to answer yes to that question, but we know that is physically impossible. The minister cannot have such knowledge but, Mr. Speaker, he must have responsibility, and that is the issue in this case.

It has always been the tradition in our parliamentary system and in all parliaments in the Commonwealth, that a minister has responsibility for what happens in his department, even though he may not have knowledge. That applies here. Of course the minister cannot have knowledge, but he has ultimate responsibility. Of all the things in which the government is involved, it is inevitable that security activities will be primarily the responsibility of the executive branch and that, no matter what devices we think of, parliament can never have any great control over those security services. These things are given to a government willingly, on trust, but when that trust is violated, when a bug is found in a member's office—whether a government agency put it there God only knows—but when there are questions of agencies of government being involved in illegal acts, then that trust must be said to be violated. The government then owes this House and the people of Canada an explanation.

Thus far in this debate and during the question period today we have not been given an explanation. I say to them and to the parliamentary secretary who did his best to defend the indefensible, that the government's perspective in this matter is not in keeping with what I like to think are the traditions and demands of a democratic society.

What has happened, unfortunately, is that this defensive government, this secretive government, this arrogant government has somehow equated its interest with the national interest, and that is wrong, Mr. Speaker. That is the dilemma the government faces, not the dilemma put by the Parliamentary Secretary to the Solicitor General. The government violated the most sacred trust given to it by a trusting people—to keep control of the security services of the country. There is

no other way they can be controlled, Mr. Speaker. The government violated that trust, and I say with respect to the Solicitor General, his predecessors and any ministers involved, even to the highest minister, that being the case, they are not fit for office. They are nice men and good to their families I suppose, but they are not fit for office. That is the issue we have to address.

The parliamentary secretary spoke of the need for security balanced against individual rights. I regard it as one of my individual rights that the security service will never overstep itself. I am not satisfied that this will not happen. I am not satisfied with the defence put up by the government.

The issue is simply ministerial responsibility. Either ministers knew and are part of the cover-up, or did not know and are incapable of supervising the most sensitive part of their departmental operations. In either event the ministry is wrong and the ministry should be ashamed of itself. It has let itself down, it has let this parliament down, and it has let the people of this country down. It will be answerable to those people for what has occurred.

I do not blame the RCMP, but they, like everybody else, are subject to the rule of law. The ministers have the ultimate responsibility for what must be done in this regard, however, and they will have to bear the ultimate burden for their failure to exercise it.

Before I go, Mr. Speaker, on behalf of all members of the House I should like to express to you and to the staff who have served us well and long this evening and morning, our grateful thanks.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: In my name and everyone's, may I say we were very happy to be here to listen to this important debate.

Pursuant to Standing Order 26(13) I am satisfied that the debate has been concluded. I therefore declare the motion carried.

The House stands adjourned until two o'clock this afternoon.

At 2.50 a.m. the House adjourned, without question put, pursuant to Standing Order.