

and certainly much more important and much more long lasting.

I was intrigued also by the fact that so far the government has been represented only by the Deputy Prime Minister and by his parliamentary secretary. Without in any way reflecting on the quality of what they have done and what they have said, I would have thought that since we have such a plethora of former solicitors general in the House, who presumably are very interested in the background of the matter, we would have had an intervention from at least one of them, if not from the present Solicitor General (Mr. Blais).

I do not really believe that anyone suspects, that the solicitor general in question who wrote the letter—at least I do not—deliberately misled anybody, in the technical sense. I have felt, and I am on the record in the House as suggesting, that a number of solicitors general, perhaps through their own negligence, have not fulfilled their statutory responsibilities in keeping themselves informed as to what the true situation is with respect to their duties.

Section 5 of the RCMP Act is very explicit. I will quote it, it is very brief. It states:

The governor in council may appoint an officer to be known as the commissioner of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police who, under the direction—

I emphasize the word "direction".

—of the minister, has the control and management of the force and all matters connected therewith.

In this particular instance it is very obvious what has happened. Someone prepared a letter for the attention of the then solicitor general, the contents of which caused that hon. gentleman to give the wrong information to the hon. member for Northumberland-Durham (Mr. Lawrence), and that is what we are debating here in essence.

Just as in the case of the hon. member for Nickel Belt (Mr. Rodriguez) who had a similar, valid, prima facie case of privilege, as found by the Chair, we find the government, instead of allowing the proper committee of parliament, which is the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, to proceed with its duty and look into this important matter, using all its resources to block this procedure. Just as it did in the case of the hon. member for Nickel Belt, no doubt we will see the government mustering every vote possible to keep the committee from looking into the background of a matter which, I would think, using logic, the former solicitors general and the government would very much want to see. They should want to see what really happened and who was at fault.

If the then solicitor general is not culpable, then somebody is, and surely nobody over there would want to allow that sort of serious misconduct to go unpunished, or at least unreprised. Right now we in the House have no idea how this happened, and what better body than the committee to find this pertinent piece of information?

I have been concerned, as I said before, about the attitude of the government and of various solicitors general. This particular case, involving as it does privileges of members, is not a unique one. The hon. member for South Shore (Mr. Crouse)

Privilege—Mr. Lawrence

had occasion at one time to be concerned about a letter that was inspected by the technical unit of the RCMP. I do not know whether or not he ever received an adequate explanation for it.

The same thing happened to me, and I wrote to Your Honour about it. As the letter indicates, I did not wish to make a big fuss about it but I was curious as to how this innocuous letter addressed to me, containing one piece of paper, was inspected by the RCMP technical branch. I am sure it is coincidental that the letter dealt with the concern of the writer for the treatment handed out to Peter Worthington of the Toronto *Sun*. It is probably just a coincidence. However, all I wanted to find out, sir, from the Solicitor General—since there was a place in the stamp that was affixed, presumably by one of the technicians of the force, for a signature and a date on which the letter was inspected—was, when this occurred and, if possible, the name of the officer or the technician who did it so that I could have a chat with him. After exchanging a lot of correspondence, I am no further ahead now than when I started. That is the kind of co-operation that members get in this chamber from the government.

An hon. Member: You don't know how to write a letter.

Mr. MacKay: A member says I do not know how to write a letter. I would have accepted a most rudimentary letter, even if it was full of misspellings and so on, from the government in response to my, perhaps, poor efforts. The solicitor general said that he took this up with the commissioner. I will quote from his letter to me of July 19 in which he said:

The commissioner further informs me that the points which you have raised have all been noted with interest by senior force personnel. Additionally, the commissioner has directed, as a result of your correspondence, that the mail screening operation at the Parliament Buildings be the subject of an examination in an attempt to alleviate any existing deficiencies, and to generally improve upon the operation whenever possible.

● (1542)

I do not know whether that is reassuring or not. I accept it in the spirit it was written, but I am still no further ahead.

The attitude of the government toward civil rights and toward the concerns of members of parliament and ordinary citizens leaves an awful lot to be desired. On February 7, 1977, I asked the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) a question relating to this subject. As reported at page 2777 of *Hansard*, he replied as follows:

Mr. Speaker, I for one, as a Canadian, would not admit that we have lesser rights than the Americans. They may have more abuses there and that is why, perhaps, they have to have corrective measures. I do not think the people suspect the RCMP of conducting themselves as the FBI do.

That was a gratuitous insult to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and the FBI, two fine police forces. Why did he give such a nebulous answer? Since that time, that statement of the Prime Minister, as so many of his have been known to do over time, has not really stood up. We find in fact that the RCMP have recruited people from the FBI to come and work in Canada, such as Mr. Hart. I find no fault with that. The only fault I find is the manner in which they treated him, and the