

backbencher; a point of order was raised today with regard to it. With respect to the McDonald commission, the backbencher has no role to play although, of course, he can ask questions about it. But as a watchdog over the executive, each member has a role. No matter where he sits in the House or what party he represents, he is entitled to fulfil that role as a watchdog of the executive. I hope that role is not questioned by anyone here.

Is the McDonald commission charged with determining whether or not there was a deliberate attempt to obstruct a member of this House? Never. That is not within the terms of reference of the commission. Indeed, I believe the commission would be horrified to find that this was its responsibility. Is it being alleged that the McDonald commission will investigate this particular situation? Well, I would want some very strong assurance from the President of Privy Council or from his parliamentary secretary that such an investigation is to be carried out. Does any government spokesman intend to assure me that the McDonald commission will investigate the circumstances leading up to this correspondence, this letter directed to the hon. member for Northumberland-Durham? Are they going to find out who drafted that letter and bring that person forward to give evidence in public? Are they going to determine who gave information to that person and bring him, too, before the commission to give evidence in public? Are they going to determine who placed that letter in front of the solicitor general and bring that person forth to give evidence in public?

I would welcome assurances along these lines if they could be given, and I would accept them. But that is entirely hypothetical because such assurances will never be given. I would also want to know whether that evidence would be deleted from the report when it is finally made, as in the case of the Mackenzie commission report—it is within the power of the Privy Council to take such action. Suppose the commission were to decide to take this evidence in camera but to include it in the report. What assurance do we have that this particular part of the evidence would not be omitted? How could we be sure that we were not getting an abridged report as in the case of the Mackenzie report? We have no such assurance.

There is only one forum in Canada capable of dealing with a deliberate attempt to obstruct a member of this House, and that is the House itself through its committees. No one else can do it. No one else has the authority to do it. The circumstances leading up to the letter which was written to the hon. member for Northumberland-Durham are an important issue, but not the only one. The hon. member himself put the matter clearly when he said the job of parliament is to do all it can to make sure this does not happen again. Can the McDonald commission give us that assurance? Never. It lacks the ability, the authority, to give such an assurance. Only the House itself can do that.

What has the response of the government been? I have read and re-read the speech made in this debate by the President of Privy Council and the reasons he gave for voting against the

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motion. I noted five. The first was that the motion had been "sprung upon the House". That is a surprising comment, coming from the expert "springer" himself. Then he said he and his hon. friends proposed to vote against the motion, not because they had no confidence in the Speaker but because they had "probed beneath the surface". Amazing. They had no idea this matter was coming up; it was sprung upon them. Yet within minutes the President of Privy Council had been able to probe beneath the surface. This meant that the hon. gentleman and his colleagues were going to judge the issue. They were going to judge themselves.

The third reason he gave for voting against the motion was that it represented a plea to close down the McDonald commission. Good heavens, it was the government's own lawyers who said on its behalf: We, the Privy Council, want to decide whether the proceedings should be in secret or not. Just six weeks ago it was the government's own lawyer who said in an impassioned speech before the commission that the Privy Council wanted to determine what portion of the inquiry should be held in secret and what portion in public, what documents were to be made public and what documents were to remain secret.

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I am sure the minister's lawyer did not just dream this up by himself. He had to be acting on instructions when he said that the government would take away the most vital part of the commission's role, that of deciding what is to be secret and what is to be open. The minister says this motion is a plea to close down the McDonald commission. That is nonsense.

The fourth reason given is that this is a sensitive matter relating to the security of Canada. What garbage is this? It has absolutely nothing to do with the security of Canada, and to allege the contrary flies in the face not only of fact but also of reason. If he had said that this is a matter of the security of this government, that at least would have been honest and we would have debated the matter on that basis. I do not know whether I should accuse the Deputy Prime Minister of confusing the security of the country with the political security of the party he represents, but to allege that this motion and its subject matter should not go to a committee on the basis that it represents a security threat to Canada is about as ridiculous as republishing 59 documents containing so-called top secret information and being for Canadian eyes only and distributing them all over Parliament Hill and Ottawa.

The fifth reason given was that the committee would be a political forum. For heaven's sake, what else would it be? Certainly it would be a political forum. The role of watchdog is to watch a political institution. Certainly the committee would be a political forum, and so it should be. Perhaps the minister meant by that that on the eve of an election it would be all partisan. That is what we expect in committees. Sometimes committees go that way. Sometimes they go other ways. I understand that, but to say that the matter should not go to a committee because the committee would be a political forum