

**Some hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Clark:** Indeed, and this is a matter of some continuing concern to us, while it is the view of the government that the terms of reference of that commission are all inclusive, consequently the denial of information by the present Solicitor General to the House is all inclusive.

It is our view that that commission does not have the power to look adequately into questions of ministerial responsibility and into questions of the role of ministers in this whole affair. Nonetheless, it is the interpretation of the government itself that it does have that power. Therefore, by extension, what the Solicitor General was telling this House the other day is that the government feels itself under no obligation to answer questions in this House on any matter relating to ministerial responsibility and the security affair.

● (1427)

It is clearly the right of the House of Commons, and within its power, to reach clear decisions as to the manner in which ministers opposite have carried out their responsibilities. That is something which cannot be delegated to a royal commission. Nor can we allow a situation where the establishment of a royal commission prevents us finding out how ministers have acted and discharged their responsibilities.

The matter of the McDonald royal commission has always been a contentious one. There is disagreement as to the adequacy of the terms of reference which the government has established for that body. The point remains, though, that the government has one very strong view: it is that the terms of reference allow the commission to look into every question which impinges directly or indirectly upon the conduct of the RCMP or the security services. According to the government, nothing is excepted from its ambit. That was the testimony of the previous solicitor general. Now we find the present Solicitor General, both inside and outside this chamber, making it clear that he does not intend to answer questions here related to matters before the McDonald royal commission. Mr. Speaker, every matter involved in this issue is before the McDonald royal commission, so what the Solicitor General is telling us is that no answers will be forthcoming on anything which has to do with this subject.

We are being asked, in effect, to accept a proposition that the executive is not obliged to answer to the House of Commons if it sets up a public inquiry to look into matters which the House wants investigated. That principle is obviously not acceptable to parliament, and I think, Mr. Speaker, that you will find it is not acceptable. The inquiry is an extension of the executive; it is not an extension of the House of Commons. Consequently, it should not be a limitation upon members of this House doing their duty and asking questions.

Parliament would be neglecting its whole purpose, let alone neglecting its rights, if it allowed the principle of ministerial responsibility to be wholly passed over in the course of an inquiry set up by the executive. We would be undermining our rights if we accepted the strange and dangerous doctrine put

*Privilege—Answers of Solicitor General*

forward by the Solicitor General that he is not obliged to answer any questions about any of the security issues which might come before the commission.

For these reasons, in the light of the very difficult position in which parliament is placed, in the light of the fact that we are precluded by Your Honour's earlier ruling from asking questions of any of the three previous occupants of the office of solicitor general, and in the light of the Solicitor General's statement that he does not intend to answer questions on matters which are the subject of the inquiry by the McDonald royal commission, and since we are assured that the commission's terms of reference are sufficiently broad to cover every conceivable aspect of these issues, if Your Honour finds that a prima facie case of privilege has been made, I should like to propose the following motion, seconded by the hon. member for Northumberland-Durham (Mr. Lawrence):

That the declaration by the Solicitor General that he will not be answerable to the House for certain areas of his responsibility and, in particular, for any matter within his ministerial responsibility which has been, is, or could be before the McDonald commission and the question whether the same constitutes a breach of the privileges of this House and of its members be referred to the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections.

**Some hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. MacEachen:** On a point of order, Mr. Speaker, I wonder whether we might have a copy of the motion which has just been put forward.

**Mr. Stanley Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre):** Mr. Speaker, I shall also be pleased to send over to the Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. MacEachen) a copy of the motion which it is my intention to move.

Sir, I wish to express my strong support of the case made by the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Clark) with respect to what happened in this House last Friday. Several of us suggested at that time that it would be appropriate to delay further consideration of this matter until we had had an opportunity to study the record. Suggestions were made that maybe some members were misinterpreting what had been said. I believe the interpretation now given by the hon. Leader of the Opposition is certainly a valid one.

● (1432)

The fact is that on Friday, in responding to questions put by the hon. member for New Westminster (Mr. Leggett), the Solicitor General (Mr. Blais) said the following:

Mr. Speaker, with regard to the initial remark of the hon. member, I want to assure him that I take my ministerial responsibility very seriously indeed. That ministerial responsibility is dated as of February 1 of this year.

The next sentence of the Solicitor General reads as follows:

What happened prior to that time and prior to the nomination of the previous solicitor general is a matter presently under study by the McDonald commission.

The hon. Leader of the Opposition has those sentences, as well as those remarks made outside the House, to support the position we are taking. The Solicitor General said on Friday that his responsibility dates only from February 1; that everything prior to February 1, both in the regime of the previous