

*Privilege—Mr. Lawrence*

saying, "We do not want this matter looked into; we are using the weight of our majority". On the other hand, if the government feels that it could win its point of view if the matter were investigated, that is all the more reason the government should be allowing it to go to committee.

I have not taken the time to look up all the related precedents on such a matter, but certainly in my time here the only case I can recall of the government voting down a Speaker's ruling that there was a prima facie case was earlier this year when the hon. member for Nickel Belt (Mr. Rodriguez) had a point of privilege. I was shocked that, after the Speaker giving us the benefit of his judgment, the government would simply say no.

The President of Privy Council yesterday cited an example of something back in the days when Mr. Speaker Michener was in the Chair. As I recall, that had something to do with a civil servant against whom there was a complaint on the floor of the House. The judgment he gave on that occasion related to the fact that that non-accused person was not here to defend himself.

This, however, is a totally different situation and Mr. Speaker Michener's dictum does not apply at all. In this case the person who has been offended is a member of this House right here on the floor. When you offend the rights and privileges of a member of this House, you offend the rights and privileges of this House as a whole. There have been no precedents advanced by those on the government side to support the government's position in this matter.

The practice is to send these matters to committee. I have known of a number of cases which have gone to committee, some of which after arriving there were found by the committee to have no privilege. That then is the end of it. Or the committee would report back to the House that there is a case of privilege, whereupon the House could turn it down. But to close the door by the weight of a government majority is flying in the face of reality, is flying in the face of what is the intelligent thing to do.

Even though Mr. Speaker may not feel offended by what has happened, I say that this action by the government is an offence to the Chair and is nibbling away at the authority of this institution, the parliament of Canada itself. I am disturbed by the fact that twice in the space of a few months the government has rebuked the Speaker in this way, and I think that it should not be tolerated at all.

I know that once a cabinet minister or two stands up and states a position, the backbenchers will go along. I hope that my friend over there does not mind my using that phrase. I know, too, that some government members, when they learned yesterday of the Speaker's ruling, assumed that it would be accepted because it was the Speaker's judgment. I have noticed some of them sitting in the chamber, and I wonder how they will vote. Surely there is something to this debate which has been going on these last two days, and surely there will be some Liberals who will not take the cue from the front bench, who will either absent themselves so that what is right can be supported, or will actually vote our way.

● (2142)

As I say, our practices are clear in this respect. That is what we are governed by around here; not just by our rules, but by practice. This practice that is being developed by the negative vote, even without debate, when we had the question of privilege in the case of the hon. member for Nickel Belt, and now by these speeches and a negative vote—these are precedents that are a black mark on this parliament.

I hope that even yet, Mr. Speaker, the House will, in the proper parliamentary way, support the motion before us at this time.

**Miss Flora MacDonald (Kingston and the Islands):** Mr. Speaker, I do not often intervene in matters of a procedural nature, but what we are debating at this time is very much more than a matter of procedure; it involves the question of how broadly or narrowly ministerial responsibility is to be interpreted. It involves as well the right and privilege of each and every member of the House to be assured of the quality and the integrity of the information imparted to them, which they in turn impart to those Canadians they have been elected to serve.

In following this debate, I am deeply troubled by the reaction on the government side of the House. It is as if they have not understood or will not understand the responsibility that each one of us has to make sure that the service, information, that we provide to Canadians is beyond question. To want to do so may sound idealistic to some, but where parliament is concerned I indeed remain unashamedly idealistic.

The motion we are debating would grant us the right to determine, in a committee of the House, whether or not a minister of the Crown was misled or misinformed by officials on a matter of a very sensitive and important nature. It will allow us to determine whether or not the minister in turn accepted that information without questioning it, or if he had any knowledge to the contrary, but who in any case relayed that information to a member of parliament to be conveyed to a constituent who felt that his basic rights were being infringed upon.

In light of some of the information already before us, that motion seems to be the only logical step for this House to take. It is the only honest step to ensure that our parliamentary responsibilities are being properly discharged by each and every one of us in this House. Here we have a situation where a Canadian citizen was very concerned that one of his most basic rights was being violated—that his right to receive mail without it being tampered with by any individual or any organization, by any member of the RCMP, would not be violated. That is what he was concerned about. He thought it was, and he raised that concern because he knew that such action would be illegal.

Because of his concern, because of the worries and fears he had, this Canadian citizen contacted his member of parliament, trusting that if anyone could get to the bottom of this matter or allay his fears it would be his member of parliament. His member of parliament, the hon. member for Northumber-