

Privilege—Mr. Lawrence

the solicitor general of the day may have been deceived. I am carefully trying to avoid coming to conclusions about this, but I think I ought to review the discussion to keep it in context, and that was that the solicitor general of the day may very well have been deceived by the action which was the subject of the complaint by the hon. member for Northumberland-Durham.

I was making the point that by going around the minister to get to an official who may have first of all deceived the minister and, through the minister, deceived the member, and therefore the House, we were embarking upon a procedure which was unique in that respect.

I can therefore only express my shock and dismay when the reporting of that decision seems to indicate that I had somehow found an element which not only was I not asked to find but which, of course, I did not find, and that was that the member had been misled by the government and, in turn, the House had been deliberately misled by the government.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Speaker: I want simply to say, not by way of any procedural point, that since we as a parliament are at great pains on both sides of the House to support and maintain a press gallery whose function it is to stay here and observe the proceedings of the House, obviously with a view to examining and reporting accurately and carefully the proceedings of the House, and since that particular decision seemed important enough to attract a large amount of attention to it, it is particularly disturbing that, when it does attract that kind of attention, the reporting of it should be so grossly and fundamentally inaccurate.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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PRIVILEGE**MR. LAWRENCE—MINISTERIAL CORRESPONDENCE**

The House resumed, from Wednesday, December 6, consideration of the motion of Mr. Lawrence:

That the letter sent by the Solicitor General of the day to the hon. member for Northumberland-Durham on December 4, 1973, and the testimony of former RCMP Commissioner Higgitt on October 24 and November 1, 1978, before the royal commission of inquiry (McDonald commission) concerning the practice of the RCMP in preparing letters for the signature of the Solicitor General, be referred to the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections for investigation and report.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvon Pinard (Parliamentary Secretary to President of Privy Council): Mr. Speaker, I want to pursue the points I was making yesterday; I note that following your remarks only members on this side of the House and the New Democratic Party approve. For my final argument, I want to go back to the remarks made by the hon. member for Northumberland-Durham (Mr. Lawrence).

[Mr. Speaker.]

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The Parliamentary Secretary to the President of Privy Council (Mr. Pinard) has the floor.

• (1522)

Mr. Pinard: Mr. Speaker, here is what the hon. member for Northumberland-Durham said yesterday, speaking of the solicitor general in 1973 who wrote him the letter he wants deferred to the committee, and I quote from page 1860 of *Hansard* for that day:

—he should be given an opportunity in the committee to tell us his side of the question.

I am talking of the then solicitor general. He should be given the opportunity to make known his side of the question in the House, if we are genuinely seeking the truth with regard to this matter without partisan consideration. On that ground alone members who support the government should examine their consciences as they vote on this motion this afternoon.

Mr. Speaker, that type of statement and insinuation is really irresponsible on the part of any hon. member who would be honourable and courageous to any degree. Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for Northumberland-Durham was here in the House when, on November 3 last, I had occasion to quote excerpts from the testimony of the solicitor general in 1973 (Mr. Allmand) before the Keable commission in Quebec on February 15, 1978, and I can only refer you to *Hansard* for November 3, 1978, on page 786, where I quote the replies of the then solicitor general who unequivocally and categorically denied that he was aware that the RCMP opened mail, contrary to the allegation contained in the letter written to the hon. member for Northumberland-Durham. The hon. member who presented a motion of privilege yesterday, when he asked that the former solicitor general appear before a committee of the House, knew full well that the then solicitor general had made known his position on the matter, and that, unequivocally. I therefore submit with all due respect that it is unfair for that former solicitor general to insinuate and indicate that he never took a stand, never committed himself and to refuse to comment on the matter.

Mr. Speaker, allow me to refer you to the statements I made in the House on November 3 this year in the presence of the hon. member for Northumberland-Durham, at which time I quoted excerpts from the testimony of Mr. Warren Allmand before the Keable commission on February 15, 1978. I quote: —the Minister of Justice (Mr. Lang) referred this morning to the testimony made by the same Solicitor General on February 15, 1978 before the Keable commission. He quoted only one answer but he could have added the two following answers on pages 50 and 51 of the document he referred to. The then solicitor general, Mr. Allmand, said, and I quote:

'No. I was told on every occasion that they did not open mail.'

And a little further during the same inquiry, the solicitor general said, and I quote:

'The first time I found out that they did open mail was when it became public after I left, you know, in recent months.'

Mr. Speaker, this is evidence the hon. member for Northumberland-Durham should have considered yesterday before insinuating that a committee of this House should be formed,