

concede the ability of the Deputy Prime Minister in argument, but no argument is going to persuade me, where the privileges of this House are concerned, that this House is not the primary tribunal in which to determine those matters.

Perhaps I am wrong, but what I think I see is part and parcel of a general tendency to cover up and keep secret anything that could be embarrassing to the government. I think these arguments should be repudiated by this House, as I am sure they will be by all Canadians who have a sense of the dignity of parliament and respect for its institutions and privileges.

The prima facie case is there, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Transport says that he is fully confident that the McDonald commission should inquire and that it be left to them. I leave apart the question of the inevitable delay. This parliament is the highest court of justice in the land and it is this parliament to which responsibility is given to protect the privileges of all its members. The orderly way of doing it is to designate a committee to look into the facts.

The McDonald commission may do very well pursuing its appointed course, but it does not have the overriding authority to determine questions of privilege of members of this House. It is the duty of the House to deal with this matter and, after dealing with it in an orderly way, to send it to the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections.

I do not think this is an unimportant debate. I think if this debate pursues the course it appears to be going, and if members of the government use their majority to defeat this motion, it would be an example of the fact that parliamentary democracy is decaying because of the actions of the government of the day.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Bill Jarvis (Perth-Wilmot): Mr. Speaker, it is with regret I note that the Minister of Transport (Mr. Lang) has left the chamber. This is one of the few occasions in the six years that I have been here that I have found an issue upon which I could agree absolutely with the minister. He went on at some length and in a very convincing fashion to indicate the dangers to which a debate such as this can lead. I could not agree more. Had he been here I would have given him the opportunity of solving the potential problem by agreeing, without further debate, that this matter go to committee.

The minister and I acknowledge all the problems that can be created in a debate such as this, but apparently our solutions are different. For some miraculous reason he felt the solution would be to defeat this motion. I am not as sophisticated as the minister. I can only relate this to the problems in my part of the country. There are a lot of farmers among my constituents and many of them produce livestock. Any livestock producer will tell us that there is a byproduct of that occupation which goes under various names. I think if I use the word "manure" most people will know what I mean. This presents a problem for which there are various solutions. The main solution in my riding is that producers knuckle down to a pretty tough job and restore that manure to the land so that it may in turn

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become productive. What they do not need is the solution of the Minister of Transport—to go out and shoot all the livestock. That would end the problem immediately and forever, and that is what the Minister of Transport is urging, that we shoot down this very important issue.

Today the Chair was very concerned about press reports and the way the media treated this matter. I only saw one or two reports but I certainly saw the words "deliberately misled." I thought that is what this is all about. I am not disagreeing with the Chair's interpretation of the reports.

We only have to read yesterday's *Hansard* regarding the evidence of former commissioner Higgitt and the correspondence my colleague received from a former solicitor general relating to these matters. As reported at page 1857 the Speaker said:

I can interpret that testimony in no other way than meaning that a deliberate attempt was made to obstruct the member in the performance of his duties and, consequently, to obstruct the House itself.

I agree. I agree that there is only one possible interpretation, as the Speaker found. I agree that the only conclusion is that there had been an attempt to obstruct, and that attempt had been deliberate. I agree that the attempt to obstruct was directed at a member of the House, the hon. member for Northumberland-Durham (Mr. Lawrence). It was not an attempt deliberately to obstruct the then solicitor general, although that could be possible. This was a letter from that solicitor general, signed by him, and directed to my colleague.

The hon. member for Northumberland-Durham has no idea who was misleading him, and I am sure he agrees with the Speaker that, whoever it was, it was certainly deliberate. I thought that would be the function of the committee. The hon. member received a letter which deliberately misled him. He has never said, and I think all those who have participated in this debate agree, that the then solicitor general deliberately attempted to mislead him.

• (1722)

Mr. Pinard: He did say that.

Mr. Jarvis: He said the letter misled him. There is no question that the letter was signed by the then solicitor general. I hope no one is denying that. However, the instruction that was perpetrated was perpetrated by a deliberately misleading statement. Surely there is no question about that. The Speaker has ruled on that. We surely are not appealing that.

The letter that was signed by the solicitor general of the day was directed toward a member of this House. That is far different from correspondence that may be the subject matter of the McDonald commission investigation. We remember the letter from the then minister of national revenue, now the Minister of Employment and Immigration (Mr. Cullen), directed to the then solicitor general, now the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs (Mr. Allmand), relating to RCMP access to confidential tax files. That gives rise to no question of privilege. That is far different from what we are talking about here. That was a letter from one minister who