

*Privilege—Mr. Lawrence*

red no prejudice; it is as simple as that. Another time when he could have made us aware of any such prejudice and when he precisely chose not to do so because he indeed suffered no prejudice was on February 1, 1978, before the Keable commission in Quebec. Mr. Speaker, I took part in the debate before the decision made by the Speaker of the House and I have already alluded to and tabled before the House the testimony of Mr. Higgitt, given on February 1, 1978, before the Keable commission in Quebec.

At that time, Mr. Speaker, you will recall that the letter referred to in the motion that we are presently debating had been tabled before the Keable commission as exhibit P 142, and that in this testimony reference was made to the hon. member for Northumberland-Durham. When I recently referred to this extract of the testimony of Mr. Higgitt before the Keable commission, testimony which referred to the member for Northumberland-Durham and which has been the object of the letter he is complaining about, the hon. member for Yukon (Mr. Nielsen) said: Yes indeed, but you cannot expect the hon. member for Northumberland-Durham to understand the proceedings that have taken place in Quebec because they are conducted in French.

Mr. Speaker, the testimony which I read in English the other day was not a translation. What was read in the House was an excerpt from the testimony as given in English. Well, Mr. Speaker, in case the Conservative members are unaware of it, in Quebec legal procedures are heard in both official languages, as provided in our constitution and recently confirmed by a decision of the Supreme Court of Canada. So when I referred to the testimony of Mr. Higgitt before the Keable commission, that evidence was given in English. Therefore, the point made that the hon. member for Northumberland-Durham could not be aware of it, because it was in French, is not valid. Secondly, the public inquiry dealt with that excerpt. And when the name of a member is mentioned during a public inquiry on an issue of such current interest as the activities of the RCMP and that, in addition, the letter in question today sent by a former commissioner of the RCMP to that member is tabled, I think that one must be an ignoramus, some kind of fool or simpleton not to understand that the words contained in the letter from the solicitor general could prove inaccurate.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, that is the second instance where the hon. member for Northumberland-Durham could have complained about the fact that the letter addressed to him in 1973 was inaccurate in the last paragraph. But he did not complain then. And that for two reasons, either one of those reasons. Either he really was not aware of what was going on publicly, in English, in the province of Quebec, and on that account I am not blaming him although I feel it not very likely, but I give him the benefit of the doubt. I do not question his word. Or he was aware of it one way or another but did not feel prejudiced. He has not been prejudiced. In view of the circumstances, Mr. Speaker, that is the second instance where

[Mr. Pinard.]

the hon. member for Northumberland-Durham could have raised the matter of prejudice for which he is asking redress today.

The motion under study today is very simple. He is asking, for reasons I do not know, that a committee of the House do exactly the same work as the McDonald Royal Commission of Inquiry. He is asking that a committee of the House consider a letter already tabled before the Keable commission and a practice of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police which is now being looked into by a royal commission of inquiry, namely the McDonald commission; he wants us to discuss the testimony given by Mr. Higgitt on November 1 and October 24 before the royal commission of inquiry, when in fact his testimony has yet to be completed, when it has yet to be contradicted though, in principle, it could be, when I am sorry to say, that testimony is ambiguous and contradicted by its own author who could in turn be contradicted by other facts or testimonies; in short, before the inquiry has not been completed.

Mr. Speaker, to my mind, the crux of this debate is to determine whether serious hon. members can, by virtue of our procedure, decide on a matter of privilege through a vote on the motion now before the House. I feel that our first duty is to ask ourselves whether our institutions, as imperfect as they may be, whether our institutions allow us to assign individuals to inquire simultaneously, on a parallel basis, on exactly the same facts, situations and circumstances. Secondly, I wonder what such a committee could do in terms of applying remedies or sanctions when, it really seems, in fact, that the hon. member for Northumberland-Durham suffered absolutely no prejudice because, were it otherwise, he would have complained about it last November or in February of this year. Mr. Speaker, there is another important, in fact, very important principle involved here. Namely, the danger that we abuse our institutions, that we arrive at contradictory reports. The royal commission of inquiry has been requested to bring in a report; it is its duty to make recommendations.

It could very well be, Mr. Speaker, that in light of a much more exhaustive inquiry and after having heard a much greater number of witnesses and studied a lot more documents, it could very well be that some time from now the royal commission of inquiry arrive at recommendations which are different from those which could be made by the committee to which we would now like to refer a letter or part of it which was quoted, and to which we would also like to refer part of a testimony. The parliamentary committee, Mr. Speaker, could very well make findings and conclusions clearly different from those made by the royal commission of inquiry, and I am convinced it is not part of the terms of reference of members of parliament to overlap and make contradictory decisions. It would be a nonsense and a procedural abuse to vote in favour of this motion.

Mr. Speaker, I see it is six o'clock and if you wish to interrupt me, I will let you do so.