

*Privilege—Mr. Lawrence*

You have asked, Sir, whether there would be more argument later. I think it is clear to say that we on this side would like to reserve our right to continue to comment at a later time and to raise again in much more depth our objections to this most dangerous proposal put forward today by the Solicitor General that will in fact allow him to stay silent in the face of questions in the House of Commons.

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

**Mr. Speaker:** Order, please. I want to be fair to those who want to participate in the discussion, but I think the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Clark) pointed out in his last comment that he wants to reserve the right to argue further. All members have said that.

What happened is that the minister in his answers today gave an indication of the manner in which he intends to deal with questions in the future. Whether that has been properly interpreted, properly stated by the minister or properly interpreted by those who have argued on the other side of the House, remains to be seen. I think that is the fact.

The Leader of the Opposition said that he wants to reserve the right to reserve argument. I think the opportunities for that argument will present themselves on numerous occasions. Obviously the next time the Solicitor General (Mr. Blais) is asked a question can be the next opportunity at which this difficulty is going to arise.

There is no motion at this moment, no specific motion attached to a specific problem. That is my point. It is very difficult for the Chair to rule in the abstract on a declaration of intention.

As all hon. members know, there are circumstances under which ministers may simply take no action in the face of a question. There are others in which answers are not given for reasons stipulated. It would be a very curious and interesting situation if a minister, who in fact does not have an obligation to answer a question, refused to answer a question upon a certain ground, and the argument were then raised that that ground was not well founded. In fact, the ground may not be necessary. These are the kind of abstract arguments with which we are now dealing.

This is a very important point. Obviously it is a matter of great concern to the House. It goes fundamentally to the operation of parliament and the theory of ministerial responsibility.

A good part of the argument relates to whether the minister in fact said he would not answer questions related to previous Solicitors General and, if he did say that, whether he has the right to say it or do it. In fact, no question of that nature was put to the minister today.

That is a very important part of the argument. That is one of the reasons why I say that a specific question, which in fact gives rise to a specific argument and specific motion of privilege, is obviously going to come before us very soon. That is the proper vehicle through which we can argue this matter a little more specifically than we are now doing. We are under

[Mr. Clark.]

the handicap of arguing in the abstract. I do not think we can do that usefully much longer.

**Right Hon. J. G. Diefenbaker (Prince Albert):** Mr. Speaker, I would ask that you give reconsideration to the statement that you have just made.

I was more than amazed by what the minister said this morning. I was impressed by what he said when he assumed the portfolio, speaking spontaneously without government intervention. He said that in his position he intended to do everything to clarify and clear up the proclivities—he did not use that word—of his predecessors in office. Today he utters in this House a proposition which means that the House of Commons might as well close down in so far as matters that come under his authority are concerned. One now begins to understand the reason for the merry-go-round in the department of the Solicitor General (Mr. Blais).

You cannot ask A, who knows more than anyone else. I refer to him as A because I do not want to refer to him by his name or constituency, which I do not recall at the moment. Then B comes along and says that he cannot tell us anything that happened under A. Now we have C. He puts before this House—

**An hon. Member:** X.

**Mr. Diefenbaker:** At the rate they are going, it will not be long before we have X, there are so many hopefuls sitting opposite. They can all join in the concealment of facts.

Where is parliament today? We cannot ask this minister. He says he does not know, that he just arrived on the merry-go-round the day before yesterday. He says he cannot answer anything with regard to what happens before the Royal Commission. As far as that Royal Commission is concerned, it was set up last July, but did not convene until late fall. At the rate it is going today, there is one thing about which we can be sure. There will be no information come from that commission until after the election. That apparently is the reason for the delays that have taken place.

We cannot get information there. We cannot ask any questions here. The minister has adopted a stonewalling attitude that was clearly defined and brilliantly spoken of by the hon. member for Northumberland-Durham (Mr. Lawrence). The rights of parliament are being tramped on again as they were in 1956.

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

**Mr. Diefenbaker:** I had hope for this new minister. I thought in the Post Office Department he was lost with the mail. To hear him make that proposition today shows he is one who learns fast in the position of Solicitor General.

● (1232)

This is not a matter which can be brushed aside as hypothetical. It is here today. If this proposition is accepted by parliament we might as well close down. Indeed, the government wishes we would, so that information might not be