

Privilege—Mr. Robinson

Clark, the Regional Director of Operations, was also present at this meeting. In addition to these senior regional officials, the senior parole supervisors from that region were present.

During the course of that meeting it was suggested by senior officials of the correctional service in the Ontario region that the individuals present at that meeting should not offer criticisms of the federal Government or the Correctional Service of Canada in giving evidence to the Standing Committee on Justice and Solicitor General the following week. Indeed, it was suggested to the persons in attendance at that meeting that they might be making a "career decision"—and those are the words that were used by the parole officer—depending on what sort of evidence they gave to members of the Standing Committee on Justice and Solicitor General.

The members of the committee were informed that the subject of privatization was used as an illustration. Those senior officials who were present were told that they should not in any way levy criticism of government policy or the policy of the Correctional Service of Canada in their evidence before the committee.

I am sure that Your Honour recognizes the gravity and seriousness of this situation. A parliamentary committee is undertaking an important study of sentencing, parole, and corrections in Canada. It is absolutely critical to the success of that study that people working in the field, including parole officers and correctional officers, should be able to give their evidence to that committee without any suggestion of intimidation, threat, or manipulation of their evidence.

Suggesting to senior officers of the parole service that they were not free to testify as they might see fit about the parole system in Canada was quite clearly, in my view, an attempt to gag, muzzle, and influence the evidence that was presented to our committee.

The committee cannot do its job if that is going to be happening. The committee process becomes a charade if individuals are afraid to give evidence before the committee or if the evidence they give has been vetted by their supervisors.

Indeed, after the formal part of that meeting I was approached by a young woman who is a parole officer. She informed me that she was asked to go through some sample questions and answers. One of the questions put to her as a question which the committee might ask was with regard to whether there were adequate resources for the parole service in the Kingston region. It was suggested to her how she might answer that question without being critical, without, in effect, telling the truth.

This goes directly to the core of our privileges as Members of this House and, indeed, as members of a standing committee of this House. This attempt to manipulate the evidence presented to the committee, in conjunction with the other activities to which I have referred, including the disappearance of key documents which a member of the inmate committee wished to present to the Standing Committee on Justice and

Solicitor General—and indeed this particular matter in isolation—surely constitutes a fundamental breach of the privileges of Members of this House.

I left that tour yesterday at noon as, I believe, did my colleague, the Member for York South—Weston (Mr. Nunziata), who will doubtless be speaking on this question of privilege as well. I left because I did not want to participate any further in that charade.

I hope that Your Honour will recognize that I have indeed raised a prima facie case of breach of privilege today and that, that being the case, the appropriate disposition of this matter is to allow the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections to examine carefully what has transpired. It has been suggested by the chairperson of the standing committee that this is second-hand information. The fact is that the committee heard from a parole officer who spoke to his supervisor who attended that meeting. Surely it is only right that a parliamentary committee have an opportunity to call as witnesses those who were involved and ask them exactly what happened on that occasion.

The Solicitor General said during Question Period that he talked to the Commissioner of Corrections who promised him that there was no problem, that this did not happen, that there was nothing wrong. I do not doubt for a minute that the Solicitor General has confidence in the Commissioner of Corrections but, with all due respect to the Solicitor General, that is just not good enough. It is not the Government nor the Commissioner of Corrections but Parliament itself which is affected by this attempt to control the flow of evidence to this committee.

I hope that the Solicitor General will conduct his own inquiry rather than only asking the Commissioner of Corrections whether he was satisfied that it happened. The Solicitor General is apparently not prepared to do that. The public can draw their own conclusions on that.

However, our job as parliamentarians is surely to ensure that our privileges are not in any way diminished as a result of the actions of government officials or others. It would be my submission—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I regret to interrupt the Hon. Member. The Hon. Member has made some comment concerning the Solicitor General (Mr. Kelleher) and what he is or is not prepared to do. The Solicitor General has not had a chance to rise in reply to the comments of the Hon. Member for Burnaby (Mr. Robinson), but all Members will know that the Hon. Member for Burnaby did ask questions during Question Period. It seemed to the Chair that the position the Solicitor General was then taking was that, having had some information concerning the serious matter that the Hon. Member for Burnaby raises, he checked with some of his officials and was informing the Hon. Member that his official or officials denied the allegation contained in the question of the Hon. Member.