

Privilege—Mr. Lawrence

Even the hon. member for Welland should concede that the letter from the solicitor general was false. He signed it. If we were to believe that he did not know what he was signing, I suppose he could well have sent a copy of the Lord's prayer to the hon. member for Northumberland-Durham and have adopted it as government policy.

Mr. Railton: I don't know how he would know.

Mr. Nielsen: There is a certain exposure there which might be beneficial to those on the treasury benches, of course!

The second point I want to make with reference to these things that are perfectly true is that, in order to be a *prima facie* case of privilege, the action had to be deliberate. Hon. members opposite have been delivering barbs and, indeed, some members on this side have been making excuses that the then solicitor general did not know the letter was false. But he signed the letter, Mr. Speaker. Ministerial responsibility has to begin and end somewhere. It had to be deliberate. When he signed that letter it had to be deliberately misleading. It was misleading; there is no doubt about that.

The letter, emanating as it did from the solicitor general, emanated from the government. It came from the solicitor general. He signed it. He made the misleading statement; therefore, the government has misled a member of the House and, as Mr. Speaker has said, that is a contempt of the House itself. Therefore, I say that the press treatment of this proceeding is perfectly correct. That letter deliberately misled the hon. member for Northumberland-Durham and deliberately misled this House.

The Prime Minister's predecessor in 1963 suffered from what we called at the time "selective amnesia". As long as remembrances occurred which might be embarrassing to the government with respect to the Rivard affair, the furniture matters or Munsinger matters, ministers conveniently forgot the circumstances. They could not remember; it was selective amnesia. The former prime minister travelled back from Prince Edward Island on a plane with the minister of justice of the day—God rest his soul—and he was told about certain things that he afterwards did not remember.

That was an affliction which dogged the government of that day. It seems to be a peculiarly Liberal affliction. They are no longer suffering from selective amnesia, but rather what I might call self-inflicted blindness, which is a theory that holds that by seeing no evil, its reality can be denied. Over and over again we have heard the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) say in this House—and I have quotations by the ream—that, of course, government is responsible for setting the policy of the security service.

Mr. Railton: You should write children's stories.

Mr. Nielsen: Mr. Speaker, I think the hon. member for Welland has more ability to write children's stories than I.

Mr. Dionne (Northumberland-Miramichi): You have the ability.

[Mr. Nielsen.]

Mr. Nielsen: The hon. member for Northumberland-Miramichi really should not speak about ability after his dismal performance in the debate this afternoon. I have never heard anything more inane in my time in the House than his so-called contribution to the debate. He asked, as did the President of Privy Council, "Who misinformed?" He wondered about responsibility being attached to an individual for misinforming the House. He did not know who it was.

I just put the question, Mr. Speaker: Who signed the letter containing false information sent to a member of parliament? Who signed the letter that deliberately misled the hon. member for Northumberland-Durham? It was the solicitor general of the day, and I am glad to see him in his seat. He has been peculiarly silent. One might have expected he would take part in this debate and attempt to set the record straight. That is the simple answer to the question.

Mr. Dionne (Northumberland-Miramichi): Very simple. That is the problem.

Mr. Nielsen: Very simple and very accurate. When a minister signs a letter one assumes he has read it. One also assumes that if the statement was made in that letter that mail was not being opened, he would recognize the seriousness of signing such a blanket assurance without asking questions. It is completely inconceivable to any logical, reasonable individual to conclude that the government operates a security service without any knowledge of what that service is doing in the country.

● (2032)

I believe that the letter contained information sent to the hon. member for Northumberland-Durham which deliberately misled him, and that was the finding of the Speaker as well.

The motion calls for an investigation, but members over there do not want an investigation because the former solicitor general would have to appear and give testimony. The government majority would then have to exercise its usual effort of stonewalling. Even so, some damage and embarrassing evidence would emerge. That is what the motion calls for.

The President of Privy Council has tried to leave the impression that the House must make its decision here. When the hon. member for Oshawa-Whitby made his contribution to the debate, he was absolutely correct in outlining the normal procedure that should be adopted when the House is considering matters of this nature. The matter should be referred to the committee, the committee should hear and consider evidence and then report to the House. Then and then only should the House make a decision.

Instead the government members, on instructions that the whip has laid on, are plugging their ears. They do not want to hear anything. They have decided the matter is not going to committee, that we are not going to get information, so that the matter will die here. They will be successful because of their majority. The facts will not be exposed.

An hon. Member: Oh, oh!