

Privilege—Mr. Lawrence

to shed light on points where it considers it necessary or useful. And that is indeed an important point.

In his argumentation yesterday, the Deputy Prime Minister said this, and I quote:

—that you say there has been a contempt, a deceit, and that is what the House is asked to find today, and the person or persons alleged to have brought about the deceit are left unnamed.

Of course, Mr. Speaker, in the letter the solicitor general sent to the hon. member for Northumberland-Durham (Mr. Lawrence), he does not mention the sources of his information. And that is precisely what we want to know.

The solicitor general of the day who was here in the House and listened to the debates all afternoon is now responsible for another department. He could probably, have risen and set things straight but he did not want to do so.

Mr. Speaker, that is why we are asking that this matter be referred to the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections so we can question him to know the name of the person who misinformed the minister, and later on, through the minister, misled the House of Commons. The Deputy Prime Minister concludes by saying, and I quote:

In this case, we neither have an accused nor an unaccused.

Mr. Speaker, it is absolutely certain that a committee of the House of Commons, be it the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections or another, is not a court of justice, but a committee to inquire into certain revelations that were not entirely made. We want to know all the facts, and this is what the motion put forward by the hon. member for Northumberland-Durham is all about.

I do not see why government members do not wish to shed light on this if they have nothing to hide.

Mr. Speaker, we support the motion. We hope the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections will have all the help it will need to bring the matter under full light. I hope it has the complete staffing facilities needed to complete the inquiry.

It is my hope the government will recognize this is a valid motion and let the committee clarify this whole matter. If it so happens that there is nothing wrong, so much the better. The mover will lose face and support the consequences.

It is therefore my view that hon. members should support the motion so that we may finally know the facts.

[*English*]

Mr. Andrew Brewin (Greenwood): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Transport (Mr. Lang) just addressed the House a short while ago, and at that time he implied that after he had spoken the matter was so very simple it required no further debate. I notice that he is being consistent in that he has folded his tent and stolen away. I agree with him that the matter is a simple one, but I come to the opposite conclusion. I think that this motion ought to be passed and that all members of this House should support it. To turn it down, and I am not unaware of

[Mr. Laprise.]

what the Speaker himself has said, would be a reflection on the Speaker, would undermine his authority and, as such, it would be a blow to parliamentary institutions generally and to the proper conduct of this House.

In addition, once the Speaker has held that there is a prima facie case of privilege by a member of this House, then the investigation of the facts by a committee of this parliament is essential. That is precisely the situation we are in now. The proposal to defeat this motion could only be based on a contempt for the privileges of the members of this House, and, indeed, of parliament itself.

Why is the government trying to hide behind the arbitrary rule of a majority? What does it have to conceal? What has it to fear in having a committee look into what the Speaker has held to be a prima facie invasion of its privileges? Do the government supporters not trust a committee of this House, upon which they are represented by a majority, to determine the facts without bias? I think the suggestion that they are not a fitting tribunal to do so is a reflection on the government members of the House, as well as on others.

The government party calls itself the Liberal party. The essence of true liberalism is respect for parliament and an openness and a willingness to look into the facts impartially, particularly where there may be some breach of the law or rules of parliament. I suggest that a refusal to carry out the normal practice of sending this matter to the committee on privileges and elections is a betrayal of all that is best in the philosophy of liberalism. I am not a member of the Liberal party, but at least I am enough of a liberal to say that what is being done in this particular debate constitutes a denial of liberal principles. It is time that the supporters and every member of the Liberal party elected to this House decided whether to be governed by principles or by a narrow view of their own interests and also perhaps by an ingrained habit of secrecy in respect of public affairs.

• (1712)

I know it is perhaps naive and over optimistic to hope, but I do hope that some Liberal members recognize that what we are seeing today, if the arguments put forward by the Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. MacEachen) are to be accepted and this motion voted down, is the destruction of a party which, with all its faults, has served this country.

The argument of the Deputy Prime Minister that the motion is based on one sentence is, of course, nonsense. It makes not the slightest difference whether one, two or 50 sentences are the basis of a prima facie breach of the privileges of the House. If we have any doubt about whether that sentence—two sentences put together—subject to further investigation and consideration, did in fact constitute a prima facie breach of the rules of the House, we have the ruling of the Speaker to take as the principle which should enlighten us in this respect.

It is further suggested by the Deputy Prime Minister that the federal McDonald inquiry into alleged RCMP wrongdoing should prevent an inquiry by this House into a breach of its own privileges. This seems to me to be highly specious. I