

motion. Here is the paragraph of the letter that has been underlined by the hon. member and taken out of context. I quote:

● (1742)

[English]

I have been assured by the RCMP that it is not their practice to intercept the private mail of anyone and I trust that the above explanation will set your constituent's mind at ease.

[Translation]

Obviously, Mr. Speaker, it will be related to the RCMP. The RCMP is mentioned in that paragraph. Immediately, the solicitor general and the RCMP are involved. And let us not forget the principles I mentioned earlier. The committee will seek a remedy and a sanction against those who are related to the incident referred to by the hon. member for Northumberland-Durham (Mr. Lawrence).

I consider that it does not take much courage and I wonder why the Progressive Conservative members have been so reluctant to say it. It does not take much courage to say that in fact the hon. member who proposed the motion of privilege, wants a sanction against the solicitor general or the RCMP, or both. It is as simple as that, Mr. Speaker. That is exactly what he wants. He seeks a remedy and a sanction against a politician, the solicitor general or someone in the RCMP. There is no one else involved in the letter mentioned in the motion or in the evidence given by Mr. Higgitt before the McDonald commission.

Mr. Speaker, this is precisely where the argument concerning the parallel inquiry is important. Why would this institution—so respectable and with its many tasks ahead—waste its time and engage in overlapping by investigating on the same people and the same facts through a parliamentary committee and the royal commission of inquiry set up by a federal act?

Mr. Speaker, in order to make my point fully understood, I will have to remind you what is the mandate of the McDonald royal commission of inquiry. This commission was set up by an order in council on July 7, 1977. Let me quote a very short extract from this order, which will show to what extent what is actually done by the McDonald commission would be done the same way by the committee which would be examining the letter and Mr. Higgitt's testimony. According to this order, its mandate is to conduct such investigations as in the opinion of the commissioners are necessary to determine the extent and prevalence of investigative practices or other activities involving members of the RCMP that are not authorized or provided for by law. And, in this regard, to inquire into the relevant policies and procedures that govern the activities of the RCMP in the discharge of its responsibility to protect the security of Canada. That is the essence of the mandate of the McDonald royal commission of inquiry, that is to look into the activities of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

*Privilege—Mr. Lawrence*

● (1752)

Such is the essence of the terms of reference of the McDonald royal commission of inquiry: to inquire into Royal Canadian Mounted Police activities. What the hon. member for Northumberland-Durham is asking for is that the standing committee inquire into a letter he received from a solicitor general, wherein it was stated the practice was not for the RCMP to open the mails. What the hon. member is asking for is that a standing committee therefore inquire into RCMP activities, the same thing exactly that is under investigation by the McDonald commission.

Mr. Speaker, what the member is asking for is a parallel inquiry. This is unacceptable. We have no time here to indulge in duplication, to ask members of parliament, public figures to sit, to make inquiries, when we already have legislation providing for royal commissions to do the work much more objectively, much more fairly, in a much less partisan way. Surely, were a committee of this House to go into the same matters the McDonald commission is now investigating, it could be seen that although the matter under review by both inquiries would be identical, even though the facts would be the same, the procedure and conduct of those two investigating bodies would be quite different, and clearly doubts could be entertained as to which of the two inquiries would shed more light and justice. As far as I am concerned, I have no doubt the McDonald commission is in a position to assess in the least partisan and the most objective way the facts in particular that pertain to the complaint made by the hon. member for Northumberland-Durham, and the facts in general that pertain to RCMP activities.

Mr. Speaker, there is something else of significance in this whole debate. Under our parliamentary procedure, in order for the committee to seek remedy, harm must have been suffered, and I wonder how the hon. member for Northumberland-Durham can now suggest, in 1978, he was harmed by a 1973 letter, when in this House, on November 9, 1977, which is nearly a year ago, in answer to his own question, the then solicitor general, the hon. member for Argenteuil-Deux-Montagnes (Mr. Fox) had an opportunity to supply him with answers which, to anyone with even minimal intelligence, meant that the last part of the letter could not have been accurate.

Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for Northumberland-Durham, and I give him the benefit of the doubt in due respect for his intelligence, had every reason in the world last November 9 through the answers given to his questions and those also provided to many other members on the other side on that same issue by the then solicitor general with respect to the opening of the mail by the RCMP. Mr. Speaker, the member cannot therefore make a plea of ignorance. He had been aware since November that the information provided to him by the then solicitor general was no longer correct. Yet he did not complain at that time, Mr. Speaker. Why? Because he suffe-