

Privilege—Mr. Oberle

written by the then solicitor general on June 15, 1971, which we understand was sent to five or six ministers of that day. The Solicitor General today has given a description of what was contained in the letter. I have to say that his summary of the letter does not conform with our understanding of what was in that letter, but he has used his description of it as part of the argument. In other words, he is citing that letter as part of this debate.

Mr. Goyer: Table it.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Supply and Services (Mr. Goyer) should know that one of the rules of this House is that private members cannot table documents.

Mr. Goyer: Give it to the press.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, this has developed into a serious issue. This House has the right to know what was in that letter; in particular, whether that the letter corresponds to the description of it given today by the present Solicitor General. The minister cited it. True, he did not pick it up and read from it; he did not quote from it. However, he has told us what is in the letter. It is part of the argument. I believe the minister ought to be required to table the letter.

I indicated that one of the qualifications is that this should be done without injury to the public interest. I believe it would injure the public interest to give publicity to any names of persons in that letter or in a page attached thereto. I believe it would do injury to the public interest to give publicity to the names of organizations that might be named in that letter. I submit, therefore, that names of persons and organizations contained in the letter should be blacked out, but that having cited this document the minister should be required by the rules of this House to lay it on the table of the House with the appropriate blacking out as I have suggested.

[Translation]

Mr. Fox: Mr. Speaker, first I am simply going to note the admission made by my learned colleague that I did not quote the letter in the House. This is the first point on which I wanted to draw Your Honour's attention.

Second, if you have examined the initial answer I gave this afternoon, I did not refer to any letter. In fact hon. members of the opposition mentioned a letter and a date throughout the debate. As far as I am concerned, I said that the then solicitor general had to advise and counsel the other members of the Privy Council on a situation which had been brought to his attention.

Moreover, let me point out that if the letter which hon. members are speaking about and which they seem to know does exist, it would be a letter between ministers of the Crown relating to a security subject which obviously should not be revealed in the public interest.

[Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre).]

[English]

Mr. Eldon M. Woolliams (Calgary North): Mr. Speaker, I would like to speak to this matter for a moment. There is a precedent set by the former Speaker, the Hon. Lucien Lamoureux, with regard to a matter which I raised in this House. The Minister of Supply and Services (Mr. Goyer) will remember it very well as he was solicitor general at the time. It involved the murder case of Geoffroy who was released after being convicted of murdering his wife: he was released so that he could marry his girlfriend. During the course of that case, the minister quoted from letters of the girlfriend and from other people, even men of the cloth. The minister, having quoted and having paraphrased some of them, the Hon. Lucien Lamoureux ruled those letters had to be produced, and they were produced. I agree with the NDP that even worse than quoting from a letter is to paraphrase it and leave the wrong impression so that there could possibly be a misrepresentation.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Woolliams: In light of those facts, in light of the precedent I have mentioned, and other precedents well known to the House, I would ask that there be an order forthwith, in accordance with the suggestion of the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles), to block out parts of it if they are objectionable. Of course, there is something objectionable in the fact that they would have a list.

Mr. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa-Whitby): Mr. Speaker, I rise on the same point of order to provide the kind of evidence at this point that would support the contention of the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) that the interpretation of the contents of the alleged letter given by the Solicitor General (Mr. Fox) departs in part very significantly from the kind of interpretation that those of us on this side who have read the letter would give to it. I say "in part significantly" because the minister left out a reference to what some of us consider to be a central concern of the letter; that is, its reference to extraparliamentary, radical leftist groups.

The minister made reference in his comments earlier in the House to the dissemination in an inappropriate way of government documents. I see the minister is nodding. The implication was that that was the exclusive concern of the government. I would like to read a short paragraph from the letter which leads to a very different interpretation. The letter that we have reason to believe is the one the minister is referring to contains the following, with certain names blocked out:

The short-term political objectives of . . . group include the organizing and radicalizing of sympathetic civil servants in getting them to support its long-term political program of socialist revolution. These people are also involved in dissemination of government information to other radical groups across the country. For example, we have information to show that a member of . . . has passed on information from . . . to . . . who was a representative of . . . at the recent . . . conference.

The point I am making is that the letter makes very serious allegations about civil servants in the present employ of the government. It is not simply a matter of distributing a document which may or may not be a confidential one. The author of this letter goes well beyond that in his accusations about