

Privilege—Mr. S. Robinson

parliamentary secretary to the Minister of State for Mines that he had forwarded a copy of this letter some time ago to the minister and, indeed, that I should obtain a copy of the letter from the minister himself. I do not quite understand how it could be said that the minister had not received a copy of the letter from Mr. Justice McDonald, dated May 14, 1980. The concern that I have relates to a couple of sections of the letter.

● (1520)

The letter is sent by Mr. Justice McDonald, chairman of the McDonald commission, to the parliamentary secretary. In this letter he states that the response which was given to me in this House and, of course, through this House to all Canadians, was not correct.

He states, after referring to the answer which was given by the parliamentary secretary:

I am not aware that I have ever indicated that I would prefer the laying of charges to await the report of the commission of inquiry of which I am chairman. My fellow commissioners are also unaware of any of the Commissioners having said that.

He then goes on to refer to certain statements made during the course of commission hearings, which I believe may have been alluded to by the Solicitor General today, and he concludes as follows:

I trust that you will bring this correction to the attention of those who may have understood that the position of my fellow commissioners and myself was as indicated—i.e. that we “would prefer any such action to await his report”.

Here we have a clear indication on the part of the chairman of the commission that this House has indeed been misled. This letter was written on May 14. I only received a copy of the letter today after persistently pressing both the parliamentary secretary and requesting the staff of the Solicitor General for a copy of the letter. The House was sitting from May 14 until well into July. At no time did either the Solicitor General, or the parliamentary secretary who received this letter, take any opportunity whatsoever to correct the record, to correct the erroneous statement which was made not only to myself but to all Canadians, and which is presently recorded in *Hansard*.

It is a fundamental point, in that the government stated that they were awaiting the laying of charges because the McDonald commission had suggested they should await the laying of charges. We have the head of the McDonald commission saying that is not the case.

In conclusion, I would urge the Solicitor General to take this opportunity—I have sent him a copy of the letter during question period—to correct the record, to make it quite clear that it is not the McDonald commission which is responsible for any delay in the laying of the charges, that the responsibility rests squarely at the feet of the government.

Hon. Bob Kaplan (Solicitor General): Madam Speaker, I would like to speak, first of all, about the policy of laying charges against RCMP officers and others named by the McDonald commission. The policy I have been following is to turn over to provincial attorneys general any evidence that comes to my attention of possible wrongdoing, or suspicion of

wrongdoing, on the part of a member of the force. That policy is in effect and we have begun a process of turning over this information to provincial attorneys general. It is their responsibility to decide in most matters whether or not, and when, charges should be laid against particular individuals. There are some matters, such as income tax, matters relating to the Post Office Act, relatively smaller in number than the main, in which a prosecutorial decision is the responsibility of my colleague, the Attorney General of Canada (Mr. Chrétien).

The Attorney General of Canada has made it clear to this House his preference in waiting for the report of the McDonald commission before addressing these matters and taking these decisions. It may well be that the McDonald report will contain some argument or some evidence which will affect his decision on whether charges should be laid or not, matters relating to the circumstances in which possible or alleged offences may have been committed.

I was under the impression that the McDonald commission had expressed a preference for a wait before laying charges, in other words, the McDonald commission had indicated a preference for the attorneys general to wait for its report to be made public before taking any action. I formed that impression from something I read in a public transcript of McDonald commission hearings. I do not have that transcript in front of me at the moment. I will certainly look it up and bring it to the attention of the hon. member and, if he would like, to the House.

I do not believe I have seen the letter the hon. member referred to, addressed to the parliamentary secretary to the Minister of State for Mines. There is no doubt that in this letter Mr. Justice McDonald says that he is not aware that he has ever indicated—and I am quoting—“that I would prefer the laying of charges to await the report of the commission of inquiry”. In other words, he is not aware of having indicated that. My recollection is that there was a statement made by him or one of the other commissioners to that effect during the course of the hearing. That transcript is public and I intend to look it up. I certainly do not see, on the face of it, that any question of privilege has been raised by this question from the hon. member.

[Translation]

Madam Speaker: The hon. member for Burnaby (Mr. Robinson) will understand that under the guise of a question of privilege, he cannot attempt to correct the statements of other hon. members. It is not up to him to have other members' statements corrected. Only those who made the statements can correct them. I noted that in his remarks the hon. member never said that if the hon. member concerned misinformed the House, he did so deliberately. Therefore, if the hon. member, following the hon. member for Burnaby's comments, feels his statement needs to be clarified or corrected in any way, I will leave that to his initiative. He is the one who can best judge whether what he said in the House is valid. I repeat that the hon. member cannot correct the statements of another