

Privilege—Mr. Huntington

controlled by revolutionaries and agitators whose principal aim is to create havoc in the postal system and disrupt the economy in general.

At the committee meeting on May 5, 1977, I expressed certain views, and passed on certain information which had come into my possession, to the then postmaster general, currently the Solicitor General (Mr. Blais), who was appearing before the committee. I said, *inter alia*:

We in Vancouver know that there are a small number of radicals running the union affairs, to the consternation of many of the people within that union. So I would say we need some democracy in union affairs, and perhaps you might give consideration to initiating something like that.

I had, and still have, a thick file of evidence to support the contentions I expressed at that meeting. Much of the information I have has come to me from postal workers themselves, the honest rank and file who seek only to do a day's work for a day's pay without harassment and intimidation, and who are as troubled as I am by the activities of their own union leadership. I have documented evidence of the theft of registered mail, destruction and opening of mail, deliberate encouragement of on-the-job slacking, distribution of inflammatory pamphlets, and other abuses. One conclusion I arrived at, and which I have expressed publicly several times, is that 45 per cent of the union membership has been denied any voice in union affairs. It goes without saying that nothing would induce me to identify my informants and thus expose them to victimization.

On the day following the committee meeting, Friday, May 6, 1977, and later, on or about May 16, I participated in radio talk shows hosted by Ed Murphy, at which I repeated the substance of my remarks at the committee meeting and answered questions phoned in by callers. At the first of them I said there were about 30 radicals in and around the union leadership of the Vancouver postal workers, and I named some of them. At the second talk show, a press release by Mr. Peter Whitaker, president of the Vancouver local of the union, was read out. He denied my allegations and accused me of conducting "a despicable witch hunt, reminiscent of the McCarthy era." He demanded a retraction from me. Needless to say, I refused to withdraw anything I had said, pointing out that I had collected a mass of material which supported my contentions.

I might add that I raised this matter of national concern some years ago when the Hon. Bryce Mackasey held office as postmaster general. I privately met with and turned over to Mr. Mackasey the information and material I had concerning the behavioural problems that existed within the Vancouver post office. I took a very low key attitude at that time. I was not seeking confrontation but a resolution of the problems besetting the Post Office, and that remains my position.

During the postal strike of 1975—at about the time the government offer was to be voted on—the union leadership in Vancouver denied those members who had crossed the picket line the right to vote on the government offer. As a local member of parliament I was approached by a group of inside postal workers and was asked for advice. The advice given was

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that they should get an injunction against the union, and I assisted these union members with that procedure. It was at this time that I became concerned with the threat to the democratic process of their union affairs.

At the committee meeting to which I referred, the present Solicitor General said:

I am very pleased with the way this meeting has gone because you have identified problems that we are very much aware of.

This suggests that, as far as he was concerned at least, nobody at the meeting was attempting to launch a witch hunt.

Following the first of the talk shows, a meeting with the vice-president of the union local, to which I had agreed, failed to materialize because, I was informed, the union had decided to take alternative action. This action was the issuing of Mr. Whitaker's press statement, prepared I believe by the union's lawyer, Mr. Stewart Rush, and the demand for a retraction which I refused to make. The union then proceeded to issue a writ against me which was finally served on July 26, 1977.

The writ was broadly worded and sought damages for slander, defamation and innuendo, and an injunction to restrain me from further speaking, circulating, broadcasting or causing to be broadcast or circulating or publishing the said or any similar slander, defamatory statement or malicious falsehood or innuendo.

What was particularly odd was the length of time it took them to serve the writ. During the intervening weeks I was readily available, either in Vancouver or Ottawa, and I made no attempt to conceal my movements. Nevertheless, various attempts were made to serve the writ at places where I did not happen to be, and it was suggested by the union's lawyer that I was attempting to evade having it served on me. This was patent nonsense, and I gave them the name of my solicitors. As described, it was couched in very broad terms and I instructed my lawyers to prepare a defence and file an appearance.

Nothing further happened until April 4, 1978, when a statement of claim was filed, the plaintiffs being Mr. Peter Whitaker, whom I at no time identified as being a radical, and the Canadian Union of Postal Workers.

My lawyers had advised me as follows:

Their delay in filing a statement of claim indicated to us that they weren't intending to proceed. However, after a delay of 252 days they have done so and we must face it by filing a defence.

It is interesting that the filing of the statement of claim was made on the eve of an anticipated election call.

The terms of the statement of claim are much narrower than those of the writ in that it is alleged that Peter Whitaker has been greatly injured in his general character, credit and reputation.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. I do not want to restrict the hon. member unduly, but I do not think the House is as much interested in the merits of his case as in the point at which he feels his privileges or the privileges of other members are being affected. I would ask the hon. member to concentrate upon that.