

of the fine traditions of this House, as soon as that is discovered, that the member or minister will inform the House he has discovered the error. Obviously the statement made in error could in one sense be argued to be an issue of privilege in relation to members and how they are affected, as indeed is the pith and substance of the argument relating to this letter. Even when it is a matter of privilege, the tradition of the House is: when a member or minister makes an explanation and gives the House the correction or information upon which he was acting, it is accepted and the matter is treated as at an end.

Specifically that is what happened in this particular case, but in a much more broadly sweeping manner. A number of answers were given in the House which were not far different in substance from what the hon. member for Northumberland-Durham alleged was contained in the letter as a part of an answer. There were members in this House, ministers or solicitors general, who had a belief which they indicated in the House and in other places in open testimony, that certain practices were not being engaged in by the RCMP. Based on that belief, obviously their answers and perhaps this letter gave assurances which either touched that question or indicated their belief in that regard.

As soon as it was discovered that those answers had been given in error—and no member suggests the error was deliberately expressed to the House—the then solicitor general clearly indicated that indeed it was an error. All matters founded upon that false understanding by solicitors general, at that point effectively were dealt with by the solicitor general of the day, as though a matter of privilege but in the tradition of the House, putting the matter to rest by making clear the error. At that time we took the more fundamental step of referring the entire question to a commission for inquiry.

Apart from the arguments put forward by my colleagues as to whether this was privilege, and the arguments by the Deputy Prime Minister and President of Privy Council indicating that the House could well judge beyond the *prima facie* level that it was substantially not, the House received an explanation that a series of answers, including the part of this one which is of the same sort, was based upon an erroneous belief on the part of solicitors general. The moment the true fact correcting that erroneous belief was made known, it was brought to the attention of the House, and in that sense completed.

Therefore, even if it were a substantial question of privilege, as distinct from simply a *prima facie* one, the motion does not present the course of action which the House should follow. The matter of any misleading by a member or minister, albeit innocent, was put to rest as far as the traditions of this House are concerned by the clarification of that error by the solicitor general of the day, as soon as it was known to him that there were facts other than those upon which his predecessors had based themselves.

As far as the House is concerned, this matter should be considered closed. Substantial questions relating to police activities are before the McDonald commission, and they will

be dealt with there. In terms of privilege, the matter is closed. There is no need to deflect or distract attention from the proceedings in one place, to recreate the confusion by having a House committee and a commission alternatively dealing with some of the same issues, to the great disadvantage of the public. Certainly we know from yesterday's experience, when the press was not able to handle a fairly straightforward analysis by the Speaker of a question of *prima facie* privilege, the chance of misreporting. As the right hon. member for Prince Albert said a moment ago, that need not happen and we need not have further innuendo on colleagues in the House. The right hon. member claimed the record for misquotes and misguided references. I believe that makes clear why I will vote against this motion. With the facts I have recited, I consider the issue closed.

● (1702)

[Translation]

**Mr. Gérard Laprise (Abitibi):** Mr. Speaker, I will take only a few minutes—

**An hon. Member:** Dear God!

**Mr. Laprise:** I hear someone saying "Dear God!" I think he had better rise and take the floor than say: "Dear God!"

Mr. Speaker, this debate is taking a rather surprising turn. One side is asking that a parliamentary committee be established to throw light on revelations dating back to 1973 which eventually proved to be inexact. Well, Mr. Speaker, I do not intend to make long comments on that matter. I merely want to say that I agree with the motion to allow the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections to throw light on that issue.

I read yesterday's *Hansard* and I listened to the proceedings this afternoon and I have been particularly encouraged to take the floor in support of this motion by the speech made by the Deputy Prime Minister and his parliamentary secretary. They were eloquent enough to convince me that this motion is really needed because of their determination to oppose it. Mr. Speaker, I understood that the government had something to hide concerning that letter and what was said as well as concerning the revelations made sometime later before the McDonald commission by commissioner Higgitt. Mr. Speaker, in the last few years there have been surprising revelations concerning the activities of the RCMP, its methods of investigations, its actions against a large part of the Canadian people and, considering those events and the actions of that police force which we used to consider as the best in the world, these revelations have undermined our trust in that police force.

Well, Mr. Speaker, we have reason to believe and to demand that the matter be clarified, in spite of the argument that a royal commission was set up to shed light on those activities, the fact still remains that the House of Commons is the supreme tribunal in Canada and parliament has all the rights