

*Privilege—Mr. Lawrence*

purposes of what I hope will be a discussion today in the House and a discussion before the committee.

Certainly, sir, in speaking to the question of whether or not it should go to the committee, I emphasize again with logic and emotion, and I do not think those two things are contradictory at all, to my colleagues in this House that certainly it would be a travesty, and a great injustice presented to the collective members of this House if this matter now fails to go to a committee, or should indeed fail to go to the committee set up to hear and make an adjudication of matters such as this.

We are dealing with a contempt of each and every member of this House. I think it would be unforgivable if the House did not decide unanimously that this matter should go to a committee.

As I have mentioned to you, sir, it is not too often that the Chair, in its wisdom, finds that there has been a prima facie case. In this case you have reached that conclusion and I know you did so after a great deal of soul searching and book searching. It would be inconceivable, now that that decision has been made, because of the importance of this matter and how it touches some of these basic freedoms in this country and of this House, that this matter should fail to go to a committee.

I would hope that when the question is eventually put no member would be rash enough to vote against it. That has not happened very often. Since 1965 my understanding is that there has only been one occasion, and that occurred in the last few months. There has only been one occasion, when the Speaker has found a prima facie case, that the House has not then voted to have the matter go to committee. I think that all sorts of conclusions can be reached and statements could be made in the event that the matter did not go to a committee for adjudication. I believe that is of great importance to the freedoms and responsibilities of this House, and is a matter only this House or a committee of this House can properly investigate and adjudicate.

First, if I may just refresh hon. members of the House in respect of the facts, I would like to give a quick rundown of the history, as I know it, of mail interference and mail openings by security forces and law enforcement agencies in this country. If members are honest with themselves they will remember there has been a suspicion for many years in the minds of many members, quite frequently openly stated in this House and elsewhere, that there has been a history of interference and openings of mail by law enforcement agencies or security forces, and perhaps by the military as well.

In particular I will refresh your memory, sir, by referring to a constituent of mine who made serious allegations to me of just such an incident. In my opinion, he had ample proof that his mail had been interfered with, read, and an investigation started by one of the law enforcement agencies of Canada. In fact the enforcing officers, when they came to the door of the addressee of that particular piece of mail, had a photocopy of it in their hands. Obviously the mail had been interfered with. There is no question about that.

[Mr. Lawrence.]

These allegations were made to me. The matter was serious enough for me to be concerned about it. The facts as indicated were such that I thought I should, in all fairness and courtesy, write a letter to the solicitor general asking him in a non-public way if the allegations made by this constituent were true. I must admit to you that I had a suspicion that everything the constituent said to me was perfectly true. Nevertheless, I received a reply from the solicitor general, referred to in the question, and no matter how you want to quibble about the wording in the letter, it left me with the impression—it was designed obviously to leave me with the impression—that no such interference with the mail or any opening of the mail took place by the particular law enforcement agency involved. There is no question about that.

At the time this matter was being discussed in the House, in the reply given by the then minister of justice, that admission was made that it was a totally incorrect answer given to me by the solicitor general. Since then, sir, to confirm the suspicion of some members of the House, there has been ample evidence given in other places that mail openings, by the security services especially of the RCMP, have indeed been taking place. As a matter of fact there are now very reliable estimates placed on the public record of this country, in other places, that this has been a decided and continuous policy of at least one branch of the main law enforcement agency of this country. This procedure has been going on in this country for 40 years. For 40 years the allegation has been made, by officers and others who are in a position to know, that mail openings and mail interference have been taking place.

I have a letter from the solicitor general indicating that no such interference was taking place. How do I know that? It is simple. In other ways and other places the then solicitor general has indicated, since the publication of this contradictory evidence in other places, that if such mail interference and mail openings have in fact taken place, that that particular solicitor general knew nothing about it. I believe that particular solicitor general even said that in this House. Under the rules of this House, if a member says a thing like that we, of course, have to accept it. I do accept it. However, this practice has been going on for 40 years. The minister responsible says he knew nothing about it. He signed the letter to me, and perhaps to others, indicating that no such practice was taking place.

● (1532)

If the Solicitor General (Mr. Blais) says he did not know that these matters were taking place I, of course, accept what he is saying. However, contradictory statements have been made elsewhere. Contradictory evidence has emerged elsewhere. There has been contradictory testimony lately. This testimony, these statements and these inferences are by officers and officials in positions of authority at the same time that this minister who signed that letter to me held the position of Solicitor General of Canada. In actual fact he was the political person who was in charge and had jurisdiction over these people.