

Privilege—Mr. Stanfield

to debate what is security, but we are not debating that today. The names are checked against existing information within the files, and if a particular name is correlated to existing information then that particular candidate could be of further security interest to the security service, and that is all.

Surely it is the mandate of the security service to direct its efforts against subversion and subversive activity in Canada conducted by any person against Canada. That mandate reflects the provisions of the law of the land contained in the Official Secrets Act and other federal statutes such as the Criminal Code.

Any argument that the security service ought to be fettered simply because an individual is a candidate for public office or, indeed, if he becomes elected to the House of Commons, would certainly be contrary to the spirit of the letter of the law and, I believe, to the wishes of the Canadian people.

It is assumed in all the arguments that any particular individual who might become a subject of interest to the security service because of information already existing in the files of the security service has provoked a reaction or provoked a response that might require further interest on the part of the security service. To suggest that candidates or members of parliament are the object of surveillance, investigation, or reporting upon during a campaign is wrong. It is only when a particular name has a correlative body of information within the security files that any further interest is exhibited. That is as I understand it.

The fact that the interpretation has been quite strict and narrow is, it seems to me, clearly demonstrated by the assurance that has been given by the Prime Minister that no member of parliament has been the subject of surveillance by the security service during his period as prime minister. It seems to me in this particular case it is impossible to draw exaggerated conclusions from a practice that has existed for a long time and which, in its application, has not resulted in surveillance by the security service of any member of parliament during the last ten years.

● (1252)

I am not going beyond that because what I have said is not to suggest that surveillance has taken place earlier, but the assurance has been given that it has not taken place during the leadership of the present Prime Minister. We are talking about a varied procedure, as I have described, which comes into play only when a name provokes a response based on existing security information, or if there is an association with subversive activity. I do not believe that this can be concluded as being a breach of the privileges of any member of parliament, or the breach of the privileges of any citizen of the land who would be subjected to precisely the same kind of interest.

Mr. Jarvis: That is not right, that is the point.

Mr. MacEachen: Hon. members may say that candidates for elective office should not be treated in this way at all, and I can agree with that. That can be argued both ways, and I think that on the grounds of privilege it is very difficult to

[Mr. MacEachen.]

argue that this particular procedure, which has been in effect since 1945 and which has not resulted in the surveillance of any member of parliament, on the assurance of the Prime Minister, in the last ten years, could be construed as a breach of the privileges of the members of parliament. I am not implying, by using the ten year period, that it has not occurred earlier. I am using the ten year period because it is based on the statement that has already been made by the Prime Minister of Canada. I hope that we are not drawing unwarranted, exaggerated conclusions from this particular procedure that has operated in the way that I have described. I have attempted to describe the situation faithfully based on conversations I have had with the Prime Minister and others who are involved in this particular problem.

Mr. Speaker: I see that four other hon. members have indicated their desire to contribute to this discussion. Obviously, it will have to be continued after the lunch hour adjournment.

There is a matter to which I would like those who are intending to participate in the debate to direct their attention. What the hon. members are concerned about, and what they ought to be concerned about, is whether in fact some regime or procedure exists which may call into surveillance a candidate for office to the House of Commons, or in fact a member of the House of Commons. That is the concern that is at the core of the question and, certainly, the members who have spoken already have expressed their concern about that.

The difficulty that I want to bring to the attention of members at this time is that we are now arguing this point under a motion which has got two procedural difficulties and which, in fact, prevents us really from arguing the basic question. I have permitted hon. members to argue up to this point, and I indicate that I will let other hon. members participate—the hon. member for Grenville-Carleton (Mr. Baker), the hon. member for New Westminster (Mr. Leggatt), the hon. member for Prince George-Peace River (Mr. Oberle), and the hon. member for Maisonneuve-Rosemont (Mr. Joyal). There may be others as the discussion carries on.

Before one o'clock, perhaps we may be able to solve the problem that the present motion raises. There are two matters: first, the refusal of the Solicitor General (Mr. Blais) to provide information, and secondly, the contention advanced by the Solicitor General that the McDonald commission is the proper vehicle for this. Regardless of the arguments one way or another as to the merits of both matters, the Solicitor General has in fact denied those statements. He has said that he has provided information and, furthermore, that he has never contended that the McDonald commission is the only vehicle for this. He has said that today, and whether that can be totally accepted or not is not the point. It merely brings it into dispute.

Therefore, in a very fundamental, procedural way, what we are talking about is a matter that is in dispute and that has never formed the subject matter of a question of privilege. We have never taken a dispute or a disagreement between members of this House and transferred it to a committee to