

Despite the fact that he told people to go and tell it as it is, he said:

God, if we can't even talk to the people who are running this country freely, there is something drastically wrong with our system.

That is from the representative of the officials who were to appear before our committee. This argument that we could ask all the questions we wanted, we had total freedom to meet with anyone we wanted to meet, is naive. The Hon. Member for London East (Mr. Jepson) is suggesting somehow that it meets the concern. Frankly, it is ludicrous to suggest that because we could ask the questions and go anywhere we wanted there was no attempt made by senior officials to shape the nature of the responses. Surely that is the fundamental issue. That goes to the integrity of the committee process.

I know that the chairperson of our committee wants to ensure that as the committee travels across the country, it receives evidence without fetter or restriction. The Hon. Member for York South—Weston has said he does not intend to participate any further in the hearings of this committee. That is the decision of members of the Liberal Party and they can defend it.

I reiterate that my concern is for this committee to do its job properly and there must not be any suggestion, directly or indirectly, of interference in the nature of evidence it receives. We heard a rather pathetic warning from the chief Crown Attorney of Ottawa on the eve of our visit to Kingston, Mr. Andrejs Berzins. He warned us there would be attempts to shape or control the evidence given to our committee and to beware of those attempts. I am afraid that this is exactly what may have happened in Kingston, in the Ontario region, and it is for that reason I believe a *prima facie* breach of our privileges has been established.

I hope that you rule that a case has been made which at least requires further investigation by the appropriate body of this House, the Standing Committee on Elections, Privileges and Procedure, and as I indicated yesterday, I am certainly prepared to move the appropriate motion should Your Honour so find.

Mr. Speaker: I think I should say to Hon. Members again, in the interest of ensuring that the public knows what this has been all about, that the Hon. Member has raised a serious matter with respect to whether or not certain witnesses working for the Correctional Service of Canada who appeared in front of the standing committee were interfered with in some way by their superiors with respect to what they should or should not or could or could not say. That is the essence of the question the Hon. Member for Burnaby (Mr. Robinson) has raised, and he cited two particular examples. There has been considerable comment from other Hon. Members with respect to whether or not the facts as suggested by the Hon. Member for Burnaby are accurate.

I will consider very carefully the interventions I have heard. The task for the Chair is to consider this matter carefully, of

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course, and decide whether or not a *prima facie* case of privilege has been established. I think it is important to keep repeating that privilege in this place is something which affects the ability of a Member to carry out the duty of being a Member of Parliament. Someone said that, in its simplest and perhaps most dramatic way, it is something that interferes with the right of a Member to exercise his undoubted and ancient right of free speech. There are of course some variations on that scene. The Hon. Member for Burnaby suggests that in this case, if witnesses have in fact been tampered with by their employers, the privilege, not only of the Hon. Member but of all Hon. Members on the committee, has been affected because, if such is the case, they would not be able to get all the information they ought to have.

• (1550)

That is the essence of the complaint. The Hon. Member for Burnaby said that this would be tantamount to contempt of the parliamentary committee. Other Hon. Members have said that they do not have the same view of the facts as the Hon. Member for Burnaby. That is a matter which I will have to take into account.

I shall give this very careful consideration. I might indicate to Hon. Members and to the public that I have given much more latitude in listening to this case than I would ordinarily because the charge is that senior public servants, or middle rank public servants, or some public servants, tried to influence, one way or the other, the evidence that other public servants who were their subordinates would give to a standing committee. That is the charge and it is a serious one and I have given more time to this particular matter than I would ordinarily.

I hope that Hon. Members realize that the general rule is that the Chair is really not in a position to interfere with the affairs of a committee. I hope Hon. Members will not take the extensive latitude which I have extended in this case as normal every time they believe they have some complaint about what happens in committees. I want to re-emphasize that, generally speaking, Members with a complaint should go back into the committee and sort it out there.

However, the charge here is a very serious one and I will have to consider whether there is sufficient evidence for me to rule that there is a *prima facie* case of privilege. That is what I am charged to do under the rules of the House and that is what I will consider. However, I want everyone to understand clearly that the latitude given in listening to representations in this case will not necessarily be extended in every other case.

I know that Hon. Members who may not be as happy as they might be with what happens in committee have an understandable urge to bring the matter to the floor of the House. However, I urge them, in most cases, to go back into the committee and try to work it out there.