

Privilege—Mr. Lawrence

behind closed doors. But without having any special knowledge of the matter, I say that I do not think the report would come in before July or August, but rather after the election.

Mr. MacEachen: We will still be here.

Mr. Diefenbaker: All this government is thinking about is that nothing be revealed between now and the election—they have enough trouble the way it is. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Otto E. Lang (Minister of Transport): Mr. Speaker, I do not propose to say very much in this debate because I think the matter involved in the issue is fairly simple and straightforward, and no doubt the House could decide on the issue and consider that it has heard enough, particularly now that it has had the advantage of the words of the right hon. member for Prince Albert (Mr. Diefenbaker). I presume that no Conservative member at least would wish to demean the importance of a message from that voice by following him as though there were anything more to be said on the matter. So, as I say, I hope the question will be put before the House very soon.

There are a number of questions of fundamental fairness which, it seems to me, hon. members on the opposite side have sluffed over and ignored in their urging that an affirmative answer be given to this motion. The fact of the matter is that some of those members are perhaps somewhat careless and carefree about whether what they say and do has an adverse impact upon a particular person involved in politics, even when they themselves admit that there is no basis for the slur, the innuendo, or the aspersion being passed.

We have seen headlines which Mr. Speaker himself noted to have been quite unfair and quite wrong in the light of what he had said and in the light of what had gone on in the House. There has been no suggestion that a minister whose letter was involved had wanted to mislead in any way any member of the House.

Let me point out that in the early part of the debate on the question of privilege, the hon. member for Northumberland-Durham (Mr. Lawrence) himself agreed that that was so, and he is nodding again now in affirmation that he was not making that accusation.

Mr. Lawrence: That is right; we do not know.

Mr. Lang: But at the time I was making that point and asking him to confirm it, I also made the point that it was unfortunate that the same hon. member had used expressions which could have left the impression that that was what he was saying. It was unfortunate that he would say that a minister's letter misled him or, as reported at page 779 of *Hansard*:

—I was deliberately misled by a letter—

I said then, and I say again now, that the fact he admits that the minister did not deliberately mislead him, that he is not making any such accusation, should have led him to be far more careful with his words, should have led him to make it

[Mr. Diefenbaker.]

very clear at the time that he was alleging an error in the letter but not imputing to the minister that he was deliberately misleading him. It is very misleading to so use words that you leave a public impression that it is the minister whom you are charging with deliberately misleading.

I say the hon. member for Northumberland-Durham was careless in what he did to the reputation of a colleague and a politician in the way he used those words. That is unfortunate. It is not surprising that, as a result, we have innuendo creeping into press reports. I am sure this is the kind of thing which hon. members opposite would enjoy engaging in, if this matter were debated further, here or in committee. That is a wrong which they do. It would be a wrong done not only to the minister but, in due course, no doubt to others who would not be there to defend themselves either. As the Deputy Prime Minister and President of Privy Council (Mr. MacEachen) said, there is a broad, sweeping accusation, without a named accused, or without any knowledge or suggestion as to where that error crept into the document.

● (1652)

Mr. Gillies: That is why it should go to committee.

Mr. Lang: So says the hon. member for Don Valley (Mr. Gillies), that is why it should go to committee. When there is a suggestion of wrongdoing, an investigation by careful investigative process is the right method. Public debate, analysis, accusation, and broad brush depiction of wrongdoing is not a process which is in our tradition.

As attorney general in days gone by, I knew the care with which an investigation should take place, before public comment or allegation is made to suggest wrongdoing. It is simply improper to use the broad brush approach, which is used time and time again in this political arena.

There is an important matter before the McDonald commission. Surely the matter which this motion seeks to put before committee, in the view of any rational person, would confuse the public and the entire process, in terms of what is happening here today, what will happen tomorrow in the McDonald commission, and then what will happen before committee. It would be difficult to maintain some semblance of the fact the innocent should not be made guilty by innuendo before any evidence is put forward. That guilt by innuendo is what we saw in headlines as a result of the deliberations yesterday. Also it is what we heard in the words of the hon. member for Northumberland-Durham when he raised his question of privilege. That is a wrong we ought not to contribute to, by taking this type of sweeping issue before committee, when no wrongdoing against a member or minister is alleged.

Mr. Railton: It should not be allowed in parliament.

Mr. Lang: In the course of argument on a question of privilege, I made a point which I should like to elaborate on now. From time to time in the House, a minister or other member will state something as though it were a fact, which turns out on later examination to have been an error. It is one