

standing committee. I submit that that is an intellectual confusion of a very elementary kind. We are not accusing anyone. A member has raised a matter of privilege as a result of a letter he has received, and he simply wants to find out how these kinds of letters get to be written. If he does not know, it is only because of the essentially anonymous nature of this government, and only because cabinet ministers are not prepared to take responsibility for their statements and for the mistakes they make.

If there are no accused over there, it is because they do not have the guts to stand up and take the responsibility for what they have done.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Rae: So do not come to us talking about natural justice. The fact of the matter is that there is no accused. There is a motion on the floor that there be an investigation, that this matter be investigated by a committee of the House. You cannot confuse it with the McDonald royal commission because it has nothing to do with the work of the commission. We have never suggested that the royal commission stop its work. What it has to investigate is the matter of how, in this particular instance, the hon. member for Northumberland-Durham was given a letter which was not the full truth.

I find it absolutely astonishing that the government is not prepared to look at the matter and say, "All right, it may be embarrassing; somebody may have been lying, someone may not have been telling the truth, but we are sufficiently concerned about the truth and about the way in which we reveal our information to members of the House and to members of the public that we are not afraid." Instead of which we get the same old language of cover up and gobbledegook, evasion and the excuse that this is going before the McDonald inquiry and therefore is not a matter for this House.

This government has so emasculated the House of Commons that it has taken away all its powers and ability to deal not only with estimates but also with its privileges, and it is now saying that we will have to wait until the cows come home for the McDonald inquiry to come down with a report. It is not even going to deal with the question raised by the hon member for Northumberland-Durham.

● (1732)

The McDonald inquiry, I do not have to tell the Minister of Justice, is a general inquiry into matters of security in Canada. It is a general inquiry into not only past but future determinations of how the security forces should be conducted and how political responsibility for security forces should be handled. It has very little to do—I was going to say something else—with the direct inquiry which has been raised by the hon. member for Northumberland-Durham. It has to do with a little letter which the Deputy Prime Minister can laugh at and make fun of, saying it is just a card. That is his privilege. You can laugh at the Speaker saying it is a *prima facie* case, and you can conduct your own inquiry into your own ministers and say you have satisfied yourself that it has been carried out, but the

only people you are fooling in the long run, the only people the government is fooling in this matter is the government itself.

Any government or group of individuals who do not allow themselves to be governed by the rule of law, who bend and twist concepts of law, such as the concept of a *prima facie* case, to suit their own needs, and who become judges of their own case and use the simple power of numbers to decide whether an injustice has been done, are a group that have shown themselves unworthy of being believed by the people of Canada. I suggest to this government that is precisely what has happened.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvon Pinard (Parliamentary Secretary to President of Privy Council): Mr. Speaker, I should like to quote a short statement which appears on the fourth line of paragraph 113, on page 102 of Beauchesne's Parliamentary Rules and Forms, fourth edition:

A question of privilege ought rarely to come up in the House.

And for a very good reason, Mr. Speaker. As a newcomer to the House, I have been somewhat shocked by the remarks made this afternoon, especially by Progressive Conservative members. I have been deeply disappointed by what the hon. member for Peace River (Mr. Baldwin) has said, and I consider absolutely unacceptable to question the credibility of the McDonald commission. Mr. Speaker, we must not overlook the fact that this royal commission of inquiry was set up under an act of parliament. The Inquiries Act allows the governor in council, through a ministerial decree, to establish a commission whose terms of reference are described in the order in council. This commission subsequently reports to the government and issues recommendations.

I think it is unfair and unacceptable for hon. members of the House to suggest that this royal commission would not cast light on the practices referred to by the hon. member who rose on a question of privilege. Mr. Speaker, either we respect our institutions or we do not! Clearly this royal inquiry commission has a legal mandate under a federal law passed by this parliament and consequently, it must be respected. Mr. Speaker, we must now deal with its terms of reference in order to determine if there is a real possibility of a parallel inquiry and this is the gist of the question.

We heard many superficial arguments from the Conservative members today. We heard many innuendos, we heard what I would call nonsensical, silly, political remarks, Mr. Speaker, but nothing really serious which would enable us in parliament to decide whether the motion should be referred to a committee or not because we should not forget that parliamentary procedure is very simple on this point. Notwithstanding all the remarks which have been made up to now by hon. members on the opposition side, Mr. Speaker himself felt it was necessary to call us to order in this debate, and the Deputy Prime Minister also described the problem very accurately.