

That is not, that is not an assurance the RCMP is giving to the minister at all, and as matter of fact, the practice was in matters of this kind—

—the practice was very often ministers' letters were not exactly drafted on precise statements of fact.

I can interpret that testimony in no other way than meaning that a deliberate attempt was made to obstruct the member in the performance of his duties and, consequently, to obstruct the House itself.

Even beyond the precedents and the complex law of privilege, I cannot conceive that there is any one of us who would accept the argument that this House of Commons has no recourse in the face of such an attempt to obstruct by offering admittedly misleading information.

I, therefore, find a prima facie case of contempt against the House of Commons.

May I, once again, reiterate the consequences of that decision. The job that I have in matters of privilege is a preliminary, procedural review of the matter to determine whether in fact it touches the privileges of members of the House of Commons or of the House itself. Having done so, I concluded that the motion put forward by the hon. member must therefore be given immediate priority and taken into consideration by the House at once. The House itself makes the decision on whether the motion shall carry, whether it shall be amended, or in any way altered and, in fact, whether there is a contempt. I do not make that decision; the House does.

I simply want to leave these matters with the House in the way that I am doing, and indicate that having reviewed all the matters very carefully and considered all the precedents and arguments very thoroughly, I have come to the conclusion that the hon. member does in fact have a prima facie case of privilege involving a deliberate attempt to impede the House in its work, and perhaps the minister and, in turn, the hon. member for Northumberland-Durham.

Having done so, and having collaborated with the hon. member to a certain extent on the form of the motion, the motion which the hon. member hands to me at this time follows. It is moved by Mr. Lawrence, and seconded by Mr. Nielsen:

That the letter sent by the Solicitor General of the day to the hon. member for Northumberland-Durham on December 4, 1973, and the testimony of former RCMP Commissioner Higgitt on October 24 and November 1, 1978, before the royal commission of inquiry (McDonald commission) concerning the practice of the RCMP in preparing letters for the signature of the Solicitor General, be referred to the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections for investigation and report.

Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the said motion? The hon. member for Northumberland-Durham.

Mr. Lawrence: Thank you, sir—

Mr. MacEachen: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. Inasmuch as there has been a prior examination by yourself and the hon. member for Northumberland-Durham (Mr. Lawrence) of the motion, would it be possible for the rest of us to have it so that we can examine it?

Privilege—Mr. Lawrence

Mr. Speaker: The hon. member for Northumberland-Durham.

Mr. Allan Lawrence (Northumberland-Durham): Mr. Speaker, I think in your own modest way, if I may say so, you are perhaps underestimating what I conceive to be the importance of the decision you have made. There is no question that in this House it is not too often the Chair finds there has been a prima facie case of contempt of this House. That in turn relates to our only mechanism to grieve and to rectify that contempt.

A contempt against the House is a contempt against every member of the House, individually and collectively. It is not too often, if I may say so, that the Chair has found a prima facie case in the time that I have been here, since 1972. I appreciate why you have indicated what you have. I know it is presumptuous of me, but I must say I congratulate you for it. This is a very, very important matter touching not only on the rights of members of the House, but because we represent the people of this country it represents a fundamental and basic right of the people of this country to find the truth, to have the truth presented to them.

I attended a college in this province, Mr. Speaker, and I know there are several graduates of that same institution in the House. The slogan of that university is emblazoned above the front door. The words are, "The truth shall make you free."

I feel strongly enough about this matter or I would not have raised it in the manner I did. I am quite gratified that you have found there is a prima facie case. To get right down to the specific and detailed examination of the matter before us, it is not only of fundamental importance in respect of the rights of members of the House and the alleged contempt committed against the House itself and the members thereof, but I think this particular matter raises a question that should be debated here today by individual members. Basically it is the first opportunity that members of the House have had to engage in a rather free running and widespread debate on some very basic and fundamental matters.

● (1522)

First of all, whether there was ministerial knowledge of illegal activities by the security service of Canada as they were taking place—that is a basic and fundamental matter we can discuss today, and I hope that we will be able to discuss it in the committee. Also, for the first time in this House and in committee, we can engage in a discussion on the actual allegations that have been made about illegal activities of a branch of one of the most important law enforcement agencies of this country. We can also engage in a basic discussion about the conditions in which a minister of the Crown may be negligent, incompetent, or maybe overworked. But certainly the whole question of ministers, if that is the alibi or plea that is to be presented to us, merely acting as a rubber stamp for officials who shove things in front of them which are immediately signed, ought to be discussed. I am not saying that that occurred in this instance, I do not know. But it is one of the