

and the impossibility of giving any particular meaning to it. What we are told envisages an investigation which may well breach the privileges of members of the House.

I hope I correctly understood that the minister withdrew his suggestion which indicated that because some of the matters involved in this were being considered by the McDonald commission, the privileges of this House may well be curtailed. I understood him to withdraw that suggestion. Thus, obviously it is not worth my time, nor the time of the House, to enlarge upon it. However, I want to repeat what I said the other day. This House is supreme. Perhaps it is some sort of perversion that a person cannot be tried twice on the same matter; but because subject matter is being looked into by a commission there is no reason for the rights or privileges of members to be curtailed in any way.

I am not clear as to how far the minister withdrew his suggestion. I think he indicated that it was not a consideration. He referred to this subject being a security matter once again. I warn the minister and the House against taking a blanket like the word "security" and casting it over entire subject matters. In the name of security, crimes have been committed and many rights have been denied to people. The use of the word "security" as an alibi for wrongful deprivation of rights is all too common.

If a member of this House is accused of some subversive activity, he is not subject to immunity; but because his name happens to be on a list he should not be subject to surveillance. We know how accurate these lists are and the lack of gifts certain police officers have in their selection of people who are regarded as being subversive. In fact we have been told that everyone in the province of Quebec who is a separatist is also a subversive. I do not have to agree with separatists, but the idea that the entire province of Quebec and a large number of the people in that province are subversive is absurd. Therefore, I maintain the question of privilege put forward by the hon. member for Halifax is proper.

I hope Your Honour will consider the matter and that it will be referred to committee. There is nothing which infringes the privilege of members more gravely than this. Simply because a person ventures to run for office does not mean he should be subjected to surveillance, which otherwise he would be free of, Mr. Speaker.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Allan J. MacEachen (Deputy Prime Minister and President of Privy Council): Mr. Speaker, I believe there is a certain amount of misunderstanding as to the procedure which is alleged to be the basis of this question of privilege. I hope I can assist in clearing up some of that misunderstanding. Before doing so I should like to refer to the motion before us submitted by the hon. member for Halifax (Mr. Stanfield).

● (1242)

If the allegations in the motion were found to be accurate, and I submit they are not, I do not see how the motion itself could become the basis for a question of privilege. What the

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motion does is make allegations against the Solicitor General (Mr. Blais) that he has refused to provide certain information and has taken a certain view in respect of the McDonald commission and what is its role. Even if the allegations were correct, I do not believe the motion itself is a basis for privilege. It could be a grievance against the minister registered by the hon. member for Halifax.

However, even within the motion there are a number of factual errors. For example, it is assumed there is surveillance by the security forces of political candidates. Of course that is not the case. The hon. member for Greenwood (Mr. Brewin), in the course of his remarks, returned again and again to the notion that merely because a person was a candidate for political office he was then a fit subject for surveillance by the RCMP or by the security force. Of course that is not correct.

It ought to be put clearly on the record that we are not dealing with a procedure that has been commenced recently. I am advised that this particular procedure, which is the subject of these discussions, goes back to the mid 1940's, and that it may extend earlier than that. Certainly it was not commenced in 1971, which is the alleged date of the manual. It extends back to the mid 1940's and includes the regime of the present Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) and his predecessor, of the right hon. member for Prince Albert (Mr. Diefenbaker), and of several prime ministers earlier than that. It is very difficult to suggest, on the basis of history, that the privileges of the members of parliament have been infringed upon in any way as a result of this particular procedure.

There is a feeling constantly being put forward in the House of Commons that because we are members of parliament we have special privileges, and that special privileges are sought for members of parliament on such a broad front. I was elected to this House of Commons not to extend privilege but to do as much as I could to narrow the scope of privilege, and I take a rather dim view of the suggestions that have been made, not only in this case, that members of parliament have certain privileges which are not available to other citizens of the land.

I want to make the point very clear that privilege is a very narrow concept when it is applied to members of parliament, and we ought to be rather prudent and economical in attempting to draw to ourselves certain privileges which are not accorded to other citizens and are not necessary to us in order to discharge our duties as members of the House of Commons.

If this particular procedure has been in operation, as is my information, since the mid 1940's, it is difficult for any hon. member to suggest that his performance as a member of parliament has in any way been infringed.

What the Solicitor General has said is that the names of political candidates are cross-checked against existing information within the security service. There is not an investigation of candidates, there is not surveillance of candidates, and there is not a reporting upon of candidates as has been suggested in the press and in the House.

Names of candidates are checked against security information within the files of the security service. It is another matter