

is a very extreme one. I was addressing myself to a question which was specific and dealt with evidence presented before a commission. The question which was raised, and to which I replied, dealt specifically with evidence before that commission. In reply, and I quote from page 2511 of *Hansard*, I referred to the McDonald commission:

● (1442)

It will be my policy to leave the McDonald commission to make its own conclusions on the evidence that is adduced. I will not be commenting on a day by day basis on evidence that may be adduced before that commission on a prior occasion.

Later, as reported on page 2511, I said:

The allegation the hon. member has brought to our attention is, again, a matter that was brought forward in evidence before the McDonald commission. I suggest to the hon. member that he not only rely on his interpretation of a reporter's interpretation of the evidence, but that he read the transcript.

Subsequently at page 2518 I am reported as having said:

I am not going to be led by the opposition to comment on a day to day basis on evidence which is adduced before that commission. It would be usurping the function of the commission if I qualified comments made before it respecting the validity or invalidity of one statement or the other. Surely that is part of the process of the investigation itself.

Then as reported on page 2519 I stated:

—I will not comment, nor will I offer any judgment relating to the value of the evidence or indeed the completeness of it.

That was the narrow point on which I resisted the queries from the other side.

I made it quite clear from the context of my replies that I recognize I will have to present information relating to the administration of previous solicitors general when such questions are put to me. In reply to the hon. gentleman, the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles), I did indicate I would analyse each one of the questions put to me as they arise in order to address myself as to whether the information can be provided this House.

What amazes and has preoccupied me, and I say this quite readily, as a result of the comments that were made, is the suggestion that in some way I have a lack of respect for this House. I would invite hon. gentlemen to consider that I have been in this House since 1972, and since coming here I have participated in the debates more I think than most members on this side of the House. I have acted as parliamentary secretary to the government House leader and have honoured this House, its concept, and its procedures. What I advanced on Friday was on a specific point, and I stand by that point. Unfortunately, some interpretation has been made, and I suggest to hon. gentlemen who have spoken that this interpretation is not that which they ought to have drawn.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. G. W. Baldwin (Peace River): Mr. Speaker, that is an admission of sorts, but if we on this side of the House must rely on that type of indication of what the minister is going to do in future in respect of questions, this is a pretty sad day, and let me assure the House that we do not intend to accept that.

Privilege—Answers of Solicitor General

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Baldwin: We must look at what the minister said. When speaking on Friday he said, as reported at page 2518 of *Hansard* in the right hand column:

In terms of my own ministerial responsibilities relating to any actions they commence as of February 1, the date of my appointment.

Taking that statement together with statements which have been read into the record by the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Clark) and the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles), together with the answers given at a press conference held by the Solicitor General (Mr. Blais) after the House had recessed on Friday—the questions do not appear—there is no doubt at all, or there should be no doubt at all in the mind of anybody in this House or in the country that the minister is going to be as limited as he thinks is essential in saving the face of his government and his Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) when answering questions in this House on this issue.

What has happened and what will happen if what the government is attempting to do is sustained? This will, in effect, have drawn a curtain over all the events which took place with regard to the office of the Solicitor General from 1971-72 until the early part of 1978. A curtain will be drawn and so far as this House is concerned none of us will be able to peer behind it. That is the situation as I see it. That would be bad enough in respect of any government which had a reasonably decent record in releasing information, but in respect of this government which has all the characteristics of a group of pack rats so far as hiding information is concerned, that is simply not good enough, Mr. Speaker. I am saying that in a non-parliamentary sense, and I think everyone knows the characteristics of a pack rat which takes little pieces of useful information and goods and hides them away.

I would urge you, Mr. Speaker, in the pursuance of the duties of your high office, to bear this in mind. This is more than just a simple procedural point. This goes to the fundamental root and issue of parliamentary government.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Baldwin: It should be considered not simply as just a local issue, but as what would happen, for example, not only in the House but in committees, if we were to be limited in the extent to which we could pursue issues and ask questions. What would happen in this regard not only in respect of the Solicitor General's Department but in respect of other departments? If this is a precedent the government can get away with, how far will it go and how many ministers will be changed?

I have been told that over a period of the last few years there have been 150 ministerial changes. The Prime Minister has taken to heart what was described as being the attitude of a former prime minister of the United Kingdom, "Greater love hath no prime minister than he lay down his friends for his life."

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!