

*The Chairman:* You wish to ascertain, do you, Mr. Reed, something in regard to the impropriety of some person who has been guilty of showing the letter. Are you investigating that?

*Mr Reed:* I want to trace that letter.

*The Chairman:* For what purpose?

*Mr Reed:* If I have to give a purpose, the purpose is this: It seems to me that this has arisen out of a political campaign. I think, for that purpose we should ascertain fully the matter I refer to.

*Mr Massey:* For the purpose of a political campaign?

*Mr Reed:* No, but as the result of a political campaign.

*Right Hon. Sir J. G. Ward:* I agree with Mr Reed. I think it is important, and a matter in the interests of the public life of this country, that we should ascertain how a letter which was private and confidential passed out of the hands of the right person and was made use of. I receive hundreds and hundreds of private letters bearing upon matters connected with people who are opposed to me politically, and I have never made use of one of them in my life. Here is the case of one that passed out of the owner's hands that was made use of publicly to politically injure a man, and I think we ought to inquire into it.

*Mr Fraser:* We shall be sitting here till Christmas if we treat everything like this. What we are sitting here for is to inquire into certain charges made against Mr Symes. The fact of any one having acted improperly in connection with a private letter has nothing to do with us. The question is whether it was right for Mr Symes to send that letter. What this has to do with Mr Symes sending that letter I do not know.

*Hon. Mr Millar:* What I want to point out is this: that there is absolutely no evidence in this case except that letter. Here is a private letter that is purloined—because according to the memorandum in the corner it is stated clearly by the owner of the letter, when it is sent to one gentleman, 'Kindly peruse this and return to me.' It is a clear instruction to him that the owner desires the letter returned as soon as the gentleman has perused it. It is not a letter to a director of the company; it is a letter to Mr McCluggage, in which he tells Mr McCluggage that he will use his influence against the paper, or treat the paper as the paper treats him. That letter has absolutely, in some form or another, been taken from its rightful owner.

*Mr Fraser:* Supposing it is indisputable that the letter has been improperly used, will it do away with the fact that the letter was sent?

*Hon. Mr Millar:* I am not arguing that point at all, or the statements made therein, but what I say is this: that if that letter had not been improperly retained, that charge could not have been made.

*Mr Reed:* I should like to point this out—that these charges have arisen out of the Stratford election campaign—there is no question about that.

*Mr Massey:* Which campaign?

*Mr Reed:* The last campaign. We have evidence before us that this letter was read by the Opposition candidate's secretary at a public meeting at the last campaign, and these charges have now been made by Mr Hine subsequent to what he ascertained during the campaign and what he used during the campaign. I think everything bearing upon that is relevant, and I think we ought to trace that letter from the time it was in the hands of the last witness up to the time that it was read by the Opposition candidate's secretary at the public meeting.

*The Chairman:* Is it with a view of proving or disproving this charge—that is the point?

*Mr Reed:* It is not only this charge. This charge is the direct matter at issue, but there are insinuations all round, and I think, for the purpose of clearing up those insinuations and generally understanding the position, we should have as full evidence as possible.

*The Chairman:* You had an opportunity of examining the last witness when he was here.

*Mr Reid:* We did, and he said the letter had been handed over to the solicitor for the company. The question I want to ask is, did the former witness receive it, and into whose hands it passed.

*The Chairman:* You want to call further evidence. If the question is not relevant to the charge we are investigating, it can be asked, but no further.

*Mr Massey:* If the witness is called, it will be open to any member of the Committee to ask him any question. Before calling the witness I wish to say that the letter was written to Mr McCluggage by Mr Symes, and Mr McCluggage was a director of the *Evening Post* at Stratford, and that letter was written to him in that position. I am against calling the witness, because I am anxious to get on with the inquiry. If there is any political capital to be made out of it, then it is equally a matter for the Opposition as for any one else.

*Mr Buchanan:* The question is whether the letter was treated contrary to the wish of the writer. Is that part of the inquiry?

*Hon. Mr. Millar:* The question is whether that letter belongs to the paper or not.

*Right Hon. Sir J. G. Ward:* I have later on some important evidence to place before this Committee, in consequence of insinuations that have been made that I spoke in the Stratford Electorate; and I think it is material that we should know why the letter was not returned to the owner. It has a bearing upon a matter that I shall bring up at a later stage of this inquiry, upon which I propose to call two witnesses.

*Mr A. M. Myers:* I think we shall never finish the inquiry if we go into matters of this kind. The question is a matter of impropriety in regard to the person to whom the letter was sent. If any member of the Committee is desirous of obtaining any further information, then let us have it, but otherwise do not let us waste any further time.

*The Chairman:* I will rule that the witness be not called, so far as the application to me is concerned, and from what I have heard.

*Mr Myers:* I have no more evidence on this charge, but Mr Copping is here, and I understand that Sir Joseph Ward has some question to ask him, and I suggest that he be called in now.