

The Address—Mr. Fox

sible and unrealistic to assume that Canada is immune from such threats.

As early as 1966 it was recognized by the government that greater attention would have to be given by the security service to ascertaining and assessing the nature and the extent of the separatist threat in Canada, with a view to identifying those individuals, groups and organizations whose real or apparent purpose and objective was to subvert or destroy, by force, by violence or by threats of force or violence, Canada as a united country under confederation.

Nonetheless, when the October crisis of 1970 struck, there was an immediate realization that information on groups responsible for the crisis had been wholly inadequate. It was not clear which specific groups involved in the separatist movement were advocating or resorting to the use of violence or the commission of criminal acts, including murder, to accomplish the changes they sought. It was difficult to determine at that time precisely which groups were conducting themselves in accordance with the law and the principles of democratic action. In response to the gaps that were recognized as existing in October, 1970, the security service realigned its operational activity to obtain intelligence on groups and organizations that had been identified as supporting the separatist cause.

Set against this change in focus was a recognition that very careful consideration would have to be given to the mandate of the security service. The protection of political and legal rights of individuals and groups was of prime concern to the government and to the security service itself, especially when its attention started to focus on a national problem.

[Translation]

One of the first steps in the formulation of new guidelines for the security service of the RCMP has been the adoption by Parliament in 1974 of a new definition of the expression "subversive activities" that is to be found today in the Protection of Privacy Act which amended certain aspects of the Official Secrets Act. It was then decided that this definition constituted a solid starting ground from which the role of a good security service could be defined more precisely.

On March 27, 1975, the cabinet defined the mandate of the security service of the RCMP and authorized it to maintain internal security, namely to discover, monitor, discourage, prevent and thwart the activities of certain individuals or certain groups in Canada and carry out investigations about them when there are reasonable or likely grounds to believe that they are carrying out or do intend to carry out spying or sabotage action, activities aiming at gathering information on Canada for the benefit of a foreign power, activities aiming at a change of government in Canada or elsewhere through the use of force, violence or any other criminal action, activities undertaken by a foreign power and related to a real or possible attack against Canada or other hostile actions against our country, activities of a foreign or national group trying to perpetrate acts of terrorism in Canada or directed against this country, the use and encouragement of the use of force or violence or any other criminal means, the provocation or the

[Mr. Fox.]

exploitation of civil disturbances in order to take part in any of the above-mentioned activities. This mandate still continues to exist.

The government is constantly preoccupied by the issue of individual rights and liberties and by the balance that must be preserved between these imperatives and the interests of the state. As far as political adherence is concerned, the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) stated the position of the government in the Commons in 1976 when he indicated clearly that a legally constituted political party should not be systematically monitored by the RCMP. On May 27, 1976, the cabinet studied which procedures should be followed to come to a decision regarding the employment of individuals likely to occupy vital positions in the civil service. The cabinet concluded that if information on the occupant of a strategic position or a candidate for that position in the civil service was available and that they gave reason to believe that the said individual was a separatist or a sympathizer of the Parti Québécois, this information was deemed to be pertinent as far as national security was concerned and it should be brought up to the attention of the authorities concerned. The cabinet also concluded that those authorities would determine the significance of such information, taking into consideration all the relevant data such as the source, the prima facie authenticity of the information and the strategic nature of the position involved. That decision is also still being applied.

Also in the spring of 1976, the government was informed for the first time of the facts surrounding the illegal break-in and theft of documents on the premises of L'Agence de Presse Libre du Québec in Montreal. Since it was believed then that it was an isolated incident, no inquiry commission was appointed. In the summer of 1977, however, new allegations of illegal acts were made.

● (1252)

[English]

After having made inquiries into these allegations at the insistence of the government—

Some hon. Members: Oh!

Mr. Friesen: Blush, Francis, blush.

Mr. Fox:—the commissioner of the RCMP advised that he believed that, in the circumstances, it would be in the best interests of the RCMP that a commission of inquiry be set up to look into the operations and policies of the security service on a national basis. The government agreed that public support of the RCMP in the discharge of its responsibility to protect the security of Canada is dependent on trust in the policies and procedures governing its activities, and that the maintenance of that trust required that a full investigation be made into the extent and prevalence of investigative practices that are not authorized or provided for by law. Commissioners, under part I of the Inquiries Act, were appointed with very wide terms of reference and very extensive powers of inquiry.