

Privilege—Mr. Lawrence

all. It was an unstamped, plasticized computer card, with an incomplete address. Typed on the card was the following message, and I think it is rather interesting to put this on the record:

Commission term report concerning security leaks of top secret data indicates unauthorized personnel have been scanning sensitive information and recording same for unknown reasons. When informed of this matter thru an unnumbered double agent, SECMIN 436-202-212 indicated that a series of dated codes be released thru this leak and then traced to source. This procedure was followed, and LANGTEK 422-902-510 was informed of the matter. Results are now pending. Data 436.

That is the end of the quotation that appeared not in a letter, covered by an envelope, but on an unstamped, plasticized computer card with an incomplete address.

We have been talking about the interception of mail by the RCM Police. In this case the unstamped, plasticized computer card with an incomplete address was not intercepted by the RCM Police. It was found loose in the mail stream at the Alta Vista postal terminal in Ottawa. Post Office officials who noted the suggestive message about "top secret leaks" forwarded the card to the Department of National Defence, and then the department passed it on to the RCM Police.

The police, whom we have been led to believe were intercepting mail, were the third-hand recipients of a plasticized, unstamped computer card, with an incomplete address, sent to the RCM Police. All this was explained to the hon. member for Northumberland-Durham. The RCM Police had no file on this case. The investigation was concluded, no breach of security was involved, and the card was sent back to the Post Office.

Mr. Broadbent: A lawyer's red herring argument so far.

Mr. MacEachen: That is the substance of the letter. I thought it would be interesting for the public to know that nothing was opened and the RCM Police were not intercepting a letter in this case, but were the third-hand recipients of an unstamped, plasticized computer card, with an incomplete address.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Tell us the story about the house that Jack built.

An hon. Member: It sounds like a recorded message.

Mr. MacEachen: The hon. member for Northumberland-Durham was given a complete explanation of the matter about which he had inquired. Of course, in the last sentence of the letter there appeared this particular expression:

I have been assured by the RCMP that it is not their practice to intercept the private mail of anyone and I trust that the above explanation will set your constituent's mind at ease.

We come to that particular sentence which was related by the hon. member for Northumberland-Durham and to the evidence that was given by Commissioner Higgitt, from volume 88, at page 145, of the proceedings before the McDonald commission. He quotes this one sentence:

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

[Mr. MacEachen.]

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

● (1622)

Those two sentences together form the basis of a question of privilege that there has been a deliberate deception by an unnamed culprit, who is still unnamed. These sentences are important, because in the argument on whether this constituted a prima facie case of privilege there were no references to all these facts. Mr. Speaker made a ruling, and his definitive comment was that it was before the McDonald commission that Commissioner Higgitt acknowledged for the first time that the letter in question was not exactly drafted on a precise statement of fact.

I would like to refer now to the testimony by Commissioner Higgitt, because I think that it will be clear that Commissioner Higgitt in precise terms did not acknowledge at any point in his testimony that the letter in question was not exactly drafted on a precise statement of fact. If hon. members refer to the evidence on page 14555 of the transcript, the relevant sentence is quoted as follows:

That is not, that is not an assurance the RCMP is giving to the minister at all, and as a 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.

Commissioner Higgitt is saying that "the practice was very often minister's letters—". Counsel at that time might have asked—and they probably will when he returns—what his particular view was on this letter.

If the hon. member for Northumberland-Durham had wanted to be complete in providing evidence to the House, he would have referred to the preceding and following comments to the statement, which is the basis for this question of privilege, made by Commissioner Higgitt. I am not resting my case upon the words which clothe that particular sentence. I would like to make a more substantive quotation of Mr. Higgitt.

Mr. Baldwin: Why don't you table all of the evidence? You have quoted from it.

Mr. MacEachen: The hon. member for Peace River has asked me to table the evidence. The hon. member for Northumberland-Durham has quoted from the evidence, perhaps my friend should ask him to table it.

Mr. Lawrence: I do not have the authority to table it.

Mr. MacEachen: Commissioner Higgitt was asked this question:

Is it, therefore, correct to conclude, sir, that the last paragraph constitutes an assurance by the RCMP to Mr. Allmand, the Solicitor General, that it is not their practice to intercept the private mail of anyone?

MR. HIGGITT: No, that is not correct, sir, and that is not the purpose of that letter and, in fact, to start with that is part of my answer—

I would like the hon. member for Calgary North to listen to this.

—and the second part is that the statement is true, if we want to think of the words being used, it was not the practice and it is not—I can't say today,