

Supply—Justice

standing by. But it was my view immediately—and this was subsequently confirmed—that it was not incumbent upon us and it would not be wise immediately to send reinforcements. I therefore told the commissioner this, as I then in my statement pointed out in my statement:

I told him, however, that while these steps were to be taken as a precaution I was not giving authority for the plane to take off from Moncton, and that this was not to take place until I had an opportunity to consider the situation further and to consult with my colleagues with regard to it.

I would like to pause there to say that I think this discussion we are now having, as well as what I said on former occasions, should it seems to me lay at rest inferences which have been raised from time to time, and raised again in the editorial read by my hon. friend, that the Prime Minister intervened and countermanded an order of the commissioner. The decision not to send the plane was a decision of mine, and the suggestion put forward that it was made by someone else is a fabrication and utter nonsense.

Mr. Pickersgill: Why did the Prime Minister say "we"?

Mr. Fulton: If my hon. friend will contain himself I will give him the answer. I said:

—this was not to take place—

That is the departure of the reinforcements.

—until I had an opportunity to consider the situation further and to consult with my colleagues with regard to it.

Does my hon. friend suggest it was a breach of constitutional propriety for me to consult with my colleagues on an issue of this importance? Does he—

Mr. Pickersgill: The minister asks me a question and I will answer it. I said the exact contrary. I said that the minister had a perfect right to consult his colleagues, and I think he has a perfect right to consult anyone else, as any minister has to consult anyone in whom he can repose confidence. But what I said was that it was the minister's decision and not the cabinet's decision, and therefore it was quite wrong for the Prime Minister to say "we".

Mr. Fulton: I think the seriousness of the hon. gentleman's criticism is showing now to be that he quarrels with the Prime Minister's use of an adjective—

Mr. Pickersgill: Pronoun.

Mr. Fulton: Pronoun—in a matter which had been before the cabinet on which the Minister of Justice had sought the collective opinion of his colleagues, as he was entitled to do, and as in a matter of this importance he was bound to do. I sought the opportunity

of discussing it with my colleagues and then came to a decision which I went on to point out later was clearly my decision. There is no question of that. Then because the Prime Minister said that "we" have concluded, after a discussion of that nature in cabinet, my hon. friend is trying to make something of the use of the word "we". Mr. Chairman, what a farce! What an indication of the weight of the case that the hon. gentleman tries to make because there is the use of a word which reflects the fact that there was mutual consultation. My hon. friend says the Prime Minister has subverted the constitution. What a farce, Mr. Chairman, and I cannot characterize it in any other way.

In the statement to which I am referring I went on to say:

These consultations were held on Wednesday afternoon, and it was decided that a state of readiness should be maintained but that reinforcements should not be dispatched at that time.

I want to skip from here for a moment to the—

Mr. Pickersgill: Would the minister permit a question at this point?

Mr. Fulton: Yes.

Mr. Pickersgill: Would the minister say, if that decision was reached on that day, why parliament was not told the following day when I asked the question?

Mr. Fulton: You were told.

Mr. Pickersgill: I was told the matter was still under consideration, and it went on in that way for five days.

Mr. Fulton: A statement was made on March 16, and I have just read it.

These consultations were held on Wednesday afternoon, and it was decided that a state of readiness should be maintained but that reinforcements should not be dispatched at that time.

There is no inconsistency between that and what the house was told on March 12. In a later passage of the statement to which I am referring, of March 16, in discussing the decision not to send reinforcements I said:

After weighing all these factors, and discussing them with my colleagues, I have come to the conclusion that the arguments against sending more men at this time outweigh the arguments in favour—

It is perfectly clear from that that the decision was mine and that I accepted responsibility for it. At another point in the statement which the hon. gentleman has already read I said that it was clear that before the government of Canada is required to dispatch reinforcements as requested the Attorney General of Canada must form the opinion that having regard to other responsibilities and duties of the force it is possible to send