

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, May 4, 1971

The House met at 2 p.m.

PRIVILEGE

MR. MACDONALD (EGMONT)—ANSWER TO QUESTION CONCERNING SECURITY AND INTELLIGENCE DIVISION OF ROYAL CANADIAN MOUNTED POLICE

Mr. David MacDonald (Egmont): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a question of privilege affecting the rights of every member of the House. Yesterday an answer was tabled by the Solicitor General (Mr. Goyer) in response to a written question that I had submitted on March 25. In this written question I asked for information as to the budgeted amounts for the security and intelligence division of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, for a statement on the cost of security and intelligence operations within the RCMP, and also for a description of the operations of the security and intelligence division.

In response to these questions the minister replied in the following terms, as reported at page 5423 of *Hansard*:

The Royal Canadian Mounted Police is the main federal operational and investigative body in the field of security. Such authority—there is no explicit statutory authority—as does exist is derived from certain sections of the R.C.M. Police Act. It would not be in the public interest to divulge any further information in this connection.

When I first received this answer today—I should explain that I was not here yesterday because I was attending to public business in Prince Edward Island—I was shocked to see the way in which the Solicitor General had seemingly set aside the traditional rights of members of this House to know the disposition of public funds and the public policy that is in effect in regard to such an important operation of government as that of security and intelligence. The reason this question was placed on the order paper in the first instance was that in the annual report tabled some time ago by the Department of the Solicitor General there was absolutely no statement and no information in respect of the cost or the policy of the security operations of the RCMP. I believe this to be a basic contravention and denial of the rights of Members of Parliament. Citation 113 of *Beauchesne's Fourth Edition* states in part:

Libels upon members and aspersions upon them in relation to Parliament and interference of any kind with their official duties, are breaches of the privileges of the members.

• (2:10 p.m.)

Mr. Speaker, I point specifically to the latter part of that sentence which states that an interference of any kind with their official duties constitutes a breach of privilege. Surely it is an obvious infringement upon the rights of all members of the House when the minister does not reply to a direct and specific question put with regard to the disposition of public funds and the amounts of expenditures which take place as a result of the

exercise of well-known responsibilities of that department. This affects the right of all members of the House and the people to know what the government is doing with the public funds it has at its command.

I would not have raised this question at this time had it not been for the fact that over the past few weeks oral questions along this same line have been asked by hon. members and the minister has been almost completely reluctant to provide the House with the information necessary in order that members can properly exercise their duties and responsibilities. Members of this House must be increasingly alarmed, as I think the general public is, about knowing whether in fact as a result of our security procedures there is security in this country.

I would be prepared to move, if you view this question as a *prima facie* case of privilege, as I do, that this whole matter be referred to the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member did give notice of his intention to raise a question of privilege, but it might be better if the Chair had an opportunity to look into the matter and make a ruling in due course, perhaps tomorrow. At this time it was my thought that hon. members would want me to bring to their attention the presence of visitors in the Speaker's gallery.

* * *

HOUSE OF COMMONS

PRESENCE IN SPEAKER'S GALLERY OF PARLIAMENTARIANS FROM FINLAND

Mr. Speaker: In the Speaker's gallery there is a very distinguished group of fellow parliamentarians from Finland led by the President of that Parliament, Mr. Rafael Paasio.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Speaker: Mr. Paasio and his colleagues have come to Canada as fellow parliamentarians; but they are welcome here also as friends. I am sure it is the hope of all hon. members that their stay with us will be pleasant, interesting and fruitful.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

PRESENCE IN GALLERY OF HONOURABLE JOHN ROBERTS

Hon. Robert L. Stanfield (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, may I call your attention and the attention of hon. members to the presence in the gallery of the Leader of the Opposition of a very distinguished Canadian, the Honourable John Roberts.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!