

Supply—Justice

For these reasons, as I said, because in my view it is my duty to look at the overall responsibility of the force and for maintaining its full integrity and its ability to discharge its duties on a national basis, which depends in a large part upon its acceptability for that role, I felt that to accept the request would prejudice that national role and it would not be proper for me, as minister, to do so.

Mr. Pickersgill: That happens to be the precise passage, at least part of it, to which the minister took exception to me reading, but under the circumstances perhaps the minister would not mind me asking him this one simple question about it. Does the minister feel that if a situation arose in any province where, in his opinion, the reputation of the force may be affected, and if there is an arrangement with that province, he has an obligation to leave there the men that are there but not to send additional men in order to enable them to carry out their police functions efficiently; is that what he is saying?

Mr. Fulton: I regret to say that I am unable to answer hypothetical questions. This is a hypothetical question. The passage my hon. friend started to read is not the one I have read. I have refrained from reading it on purpose. It is the passage in which I went further into the details as to how this clause should be interpreted, and I am not in a position to discuss that because the government of Newfoundland has placed the matter before the Supreme Court of Canada.

Now, Mr. Chairman, I think I should say one or two words with regard to the allegations made by the hon. member—

Mr. Pearson: Before the minister gets on to that, would he deal with the two questions which I asked him and which I do not think are hypothetical. He has just said the basis of his decision was the fact the government of Newfoundland had gone beyond the usual role of government. I asked him if that was his view of the role of the government of Newfoundland in this matter, had he taken up this question with the government of Newfoundland through the attorney general and discussed it with him before he discussed it with his colleagues or, indeed, after he discussed it with his colleagues and before he made his decision? This was one of the questions: Had there been consultation with the attorney general of Newfoundland over the role of the government of Newfoundland before this decision was made?

The other question was with regard to the implication that if the commissioner of

[Mr. Fulton.]

the R.C.M.P. had said the reinforcements were required for the safety of the police, the reinforcements would have been sent. The commissioner said he could not make any such statement as that, and he was not going to accept that they were required for the safety of the police. He stated that this consideration did not enter into it and, therefore, because that consideration did not enter into it the reinforcements were never sent. Would the minister deal with those two matters?

Mr. Fulton: With regard to the first matter, there was some consultation with the attorney general of Newfoundland on an earlier occasion concerning the role that the government was adopting in the labour dispute.

Mr. Pickersgill: Could the minister say when that consultation was?

Mr. Fulton: I cannot tell my hon. friend. It was a telephone conversation which would probably be within a week of the Badger incident. I think it was made pretty clear on both sides, although it was a personal conversation and I do not want to go into details, that there were the gravest reservations as to the course being followed by the other. I do not say it was related specifically to police reinforcements, but it was related to the situation generally.

Then the other question was with relation to whether the reinforcements were necessary to protect the lives and safety of the men already there. I did not say, and I do not believe I left the impression but if I did leave the impression I want to clear it up right away, that this matter was discussed as being the sole determining factor. But I, in assessing the request for reinforcements, wanted to be certain as to what the position was with respect to every factor that might be relevant in making a decision. It was only in that sense that the question was asked. I have only mentioned the question because it was referred to specifically in editorials read by my hon. friend from Bonavista-Twillingate. I have hitherto ignored the inference raised that, by reason of refusing the reinforcements, I was placing the lives and safety of the police already there in jeopardy. It was only for the purpose of clearing up any doubts on that score that I made reference to the discussion with the commissioner.

Mr. Pickersgill: If the minister would permit me I should like to ask him a question to clear up this business about consultation with the attorney general of Newfoundland. He told me on March 12 he had had a conversation with the attorney general of Newfoundland the evening before. I should like to ask