

*Interim Supply*

In the course of the debate yesterday, Mr. Chairman, some Members who participated were critical of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, and no defence of that magnificent body has come from Government circles. We asked for it at different times during the last several months. The former Minister of Justice did not defend that force in this House. The Prime Minister at some time or other must express his opinion of that body because this is a body in which Canada has justly taken pride for generations. I do not know of any police force in the world that is held in higher regard generally than the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. During the course of my lifetime I have had occasion, as have thousands of Canadians, to rejoice in the fact that we have such a superior body of people devoting their lives to law enforcement. The Government of this country should stand behind the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and deal with the critics who from time to time attempt to downgrade that body of devoted servants of Canada.

Now, Mr. Chairman, my remarks this afternoon will be made with or without the presence of the Prime Minister. I regret that he is unable perhaps to be in the Chamber today but I cannot choose the time when I speak to fit in with his presence here. The Prime Minister, in my opinion, is the central figure on whose shoulders rests the responsibility for the problem that has faced us for several months, and which has yet in some parts to be resolved. I am not implicating him in any charge of smuggling narcotics, but I place squarely on the Prime Minister's shoulders the responsibility for not taking adequate steps earlier to deal with the circumstances in Government circles and within his party which have caused disturbances in the minds of Canadians regarding Parliament as a whole. This lack of action has caused a loss in confidence in the Government of this country and has created a lack of confidence in the Department of Justice and in law enforcement in Canada. No one who pauses to think for a moment about this sordid affair can be anything but distressed by the fact that the Prime Minister did not take some earlier action.

• (5:30 p.m.)

Last evening I heard the Prime Minister on television, or perhaps it was on radio this morning, make the following statement, and I know the first few words are accurate but I am not sure about the concluding words: "When it appeared last fall that an inquiry

should be held", we arranged for that to be done. This situation did not just appear on the horizon. The matter was discussed in the House of Commons and the Prime Minister woke up to the fact that he and his Ministers had not been active during the weeks and months that preceded that disclosure.

Had it not been for this disclosure in November, what might have happened? Would all of this sordid business have been swept under the rug, hushed up and kept quiet? Would the Canadian people never have heard about the activities of the then Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister, the activities of an executive assistant and the activities of a special assistant—people who were close to the Ministers of the Crown? Would all of this have been concealed?

The Prime Minister, speaking outside the House, said that last fall when it appeared that an inquiry was necessary he took action. He tried to create the impression that he was vigorous in seizing this matter when it was brought to his attention. It was brought to his attention much earlier than November 23. The hon. Member for Calgary North on November 24 asked two or three questions of the Prime Minister as to when he had been informed of this particular problem, to which some rather evasive answers were given. At page 10429 of *Hansard* one will find the following recorded:

Mr. Harkness: Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister's answer touched upon the ambiguity I mentioned, which was the reason for my question. When the Prime Minister said he was informed before the minister's estimates were put before the house, does he mean he was informed yesterday or a week ago? When was he informed?

Mr. Pearson: Mr. Speaker, I think I was informed on the day before his estimates were brought before the house.

We have heard quite a lot about the selective amnesia of the Prime Minister, but we know now from the record, as a result of his sudden recollection of events and his letter to Mr. Justice Dorion, that he had been informed as far back as September 2. When it appeared to the Prime Minister, if I may use his words, on September 2 that there was trouble within high circles of Government, why did he not take immediate action? Why did he postpone taking action? Was he a party to the covering-up job? This is a serious question.

Mr. Pickersgill: Mr. Chairman, would the hon. gentleman permit me to ask him a question?