

Morality in Government

the thought that I believe that as a general rule the principle by which we should be guided is that parliament is supreme, that it is only in extreme cases that we might consider our debates to be limited in some way in light of certain considerations, including the fact that certain questions have been referred to a royal commission.

This principle is in accordance with the authorities I have cited. It is certainly sustained very strongly by the ruling of Mr. Speaker Michener. However, I thought that at that time I should bring to the attention of hon. members the fact that there is a limitation, and a very narrow one, to the general rule that no reference should be made in the course of our discussions to evidence given in any proceeding before a royal commission or inquiry. The reason, of course, is that we would not want to have a parallel inquiry going on in the house at the same time as that now being carried out in another forum.

However, having taken that into account I still believe that the rule to which I referred a moment ago applies, namely, that this type of question is not really sub judice but can be discussed here.

When I made my ruling a moment ago I said that there was much merit to the suggestion made by the hon. member for Peace River that certain decisions or bits and pieces of evidence which come out in the course of a hearing might not be of the essence of the matter which is before a royal commission or inquiry, and because of this we should not be precluded from discussing certain matters. I do not want to reduce this to the absurd but, for example, if in the course of his evidence a witness said that it was raining or was not raining we could not come to the conclusion that we could not discuss the weather in the House of Commons. In other words, there is a limitation in this regard. We cannot eliminate from our discussion in the house any evidence that is presented before a commission.

In my opinion the type of subject matter contained in the amendment presented by the hon. member for Royal is collateral to the main issue. It does not refer to the essence of the evidence but rather to knowledge, acquired from evidence, of what is considered to be a collateral issue, namely, the manner in which certain information was given by or obtained from the R.C.M. Police.

When there is doubt in the mind of the Chair I believe there is an obligation on the part of the Speaker to give the benefit of whatever doubt there may be in his mind to

[Mr. Speaker.]

the hon. member who wishes to discuss such a matter in this chamber. On the basis of the authorities I have quoted this afternoon and on the basis of further evidence presented for my consideration by hon. members who have taken part in the discussion on the point of order raised, I feel that the amendment is in order and should be accepted.

Mr. Andrew Brewin (Greenwood): Mr. Speaker, I should like to say to the house that we in this party intend to support the amendment presented by the hon. member for Royal (Mr. Fairweather). We do so because we share with every person who believes in parliamentary democracy a very grave sense of disquiet over what has been revealed in the last few days and has now been made the subject matter of this motion.

It would appear, Mr. Speaker, that police reports of a confidential nature gathered, we presume, for security reasons have been used, threatened to be used, sought to be used or made available to be used, against members of parliament, not for police or security purposes but for political purposes. If this is so, Mr. Speaker, it reduces our police system to the point where we have political police, and this is something we should stand up and oppose as vigorously and firmly as we possibly can.

Every member of this house knows that in an era of cold war or total war it is inevitable that some things happen which we would rather did not happen. One of the things which does happen is that acts of espionage and sabotage are committed, against which it is necessary that the sovereign state protect itself. One of the instruments the sovereign state must use is a police force which collects confidential and secret information and maintains files or dossiers on public men. We do not complain, Mr. Speaker—I think least of all can anyone in public life do so—about the proposition that police who are charged with the responsibility of maintaining our security should keep dossiers or records on individuals.

We are all very conscious of the fact that these dossiers must of their nature include much that is gossip, much that is unverified, much that is perhaps even false and malicious fabrication. The duty of the police who are charged with this responsibility is to collect unreliable as well as reliable information and to sift it out.

As a result of the era in which we are living the weapon of blackmail can be used