

the great volume of correspondence which the R.C.M.P. receives as a police force, it would be desirable to compel the force to put on the public record of the house its files, by way of private members' notices of motion. I would rather prefer to address myself—

Mr. Fisher: Could I ask the parliamentary secretary a question? Before he gets down to this basic principle, will he note the fact that the R.C.M.P. has indicated that this is a reputable news media? Surely that does make a distinction or difference between the communications with private organizations and individuals, or between police forces, or within the police themselves? I would like to suggest that this is an indication of a communication between the R.C.M.P. and a news media, in other words, the same as with any other publisher, and I think this does make a distinction that the parliamentary secretary may be missing. I would like him to comment on that.

Mr. Macdonald: I would say not. I would say the principle applies, whatever the nature of the communication from any person. I would prefer to go on and address my remarks to this particular question, that whatever the source, whatever its pedigree in the mind of the hon. member or in the mind of anyone else, whatever the nature of the type of communication, I would submit to the house that in so far as it relates to the police work of the R.C.M.P. it would not be desirable to put on the public record, or create a precedent of putting on the record, the kind of information which might be enclosed in correspondence from any body, whether reputable or having a lack of reputation, and whether it has to do with the reputation or otherwise of a particular organization.

Mr. Fisher: Could I ask the parliamentary secretary another question? Is this on the basis that it is a police organization, or is it on the basis that it is a government agency?

Mr. Macdonald: Mr. Speaker, I put it in this connection exclusively on the basis it is a police organization, and it is a type of government agency with particular characteristics which make it undesirable for correspondence, albeit departmental correspondence, to be made available in this public way.

The function of the R.C.M.P. is set out and can be found by hon. members in chapter 241 of the revised statutes. Its general functions are well understood—the duties of preserving the peace, of preventing crime, preventing violence and offence against the laws of Canada, and also apprehending offenders against those laws. In the job of carrying out its particular function the R.C.M.P.—as indeed with all police forces—must have access to

Alert Service Correspondence with R.C.M.P. all possible information which can be legitimately obtained, or which may be proffered to it, for the purpose of informing itself in connection with its particular duties. I would say this is so whether it is a matter of investigating a particular offence, investigating conduct in a particular case that may be felt to create a particular offence, or conduct in general which may give the police the opportunity of evaluating whether or not further investigations are required which may form an additional fragment going into, as the hon. member said, the composite picture of the situation, or general background information which could facilitate the Royal Canadian Mounted Police in the course of carrying out the duties to which I have referred.

Mr. Fairweather: Mr. Speaker, could I interrupt the hon. member at this point? It might be helpful to us. Does the hon. member think the Royal Canadian Mounted Police should comment on the reputation or otherwise of an organization like the strange one that is the subject matter of the motion of the hon. member for Port Arthur (Mr. Fisher)?

Mr. Macdonald: I would say to the hon. member for Royal (Mr. Fairweather) that my personal opinion would be that they should not, and I can only say that this particular response was given at a time when the hon. gentlemen who now form the government were not responsible for giving—

Mr. Fisher: On that point, Mr. Speaker, surely the parliamentary secretary is not suggesting that this is not a direct answer from the Royal Canadian Mounted Police? He is surely not introducing the response of the former government? The answer is that the R.C.M.P. has knowledge of the objectives of the Alert Service and has co-operated with this service, as it does with any reputable news media. In other words, the relationship I am interested in is that between the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and a reputable news media.

Mr. Macdonald: Mr. Speaker, this really gets into the question of the underlying basis for the answers given in the house. I am suggesting this is the responsibility of the government. The government is generally responsible, as members of the hon. member's party have pointed out from time to time, for the activities of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. If the particular activity happens to be that of giving an answer to a question in this house, I suggest there is a responsibility in the government.

Mr. Fisher: The hon. member is not doubting the accuracy of this reply?