

to this particular piece of correspondence, I would think that that probably answers that one argument. Again, it is something I would have to look at very carefully.

[Translation]

Mr. Yvon Pinard (Parliamentary Secretary to President of Privy Council): Mr. Speaker, before starting my argumentation with respect to your remark and that of the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) who said, and I quote:

[English]

—Higgitt brought the letter into the open in the last days. This letter was brought in the open by Mr. Higgitt, not in the last days, but on February 1, 1978, publicly at the Keable inquiry. I would like to refer this House to the report of the Keable inquiry, volume 102 at page 62, where Mr. Michel Decary asks Mr. Higgitt in reference to exhibit P-142:

Now on page two (2) Mr. Allmand writes, or maybe someone for him but it does bear Mr. Allmand's signature:

"I have been assured by the RCMP that it is not their practice to intercept the private mail of anyone and I trust that the above explanation will set your constituent's mind at ease".

Mr. Decary asks the question again:

Do you recall having discussed with Mr. Allmand in the month of November or December, but anyway before December of 1973, such a practice of interception of private mail of citizens of Canada?

A. No, I do not recall any such conversation.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Would the hon. member permit a question?

Mr. Pinard: With pleasure, at the end of my intervention. What I want to say at this point, because I realize that it is very close to one o'clock, is that it is not exact to state that the letter on which the hon. member has based his question of privilege came out only in the last days. It was made public, and the hon. member should have known at least that it was public, at the Keable inquiry February 1, 1978. If the House is interested I can table part of this testimony so that hon. members will have knowledge of it.

● (1302)

Mr. Speaker: The hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, I wanted to ask the hon. member if, in that testimony before the Keable commission, specific reference was made to the fact that that was a letter addressed to the hon. member for Northumberland-Durham (Mr. Lawrence).

Mr. Pinard: The answer to that question is very simple, Mr. Speaker; it is yes. May I quote the question put by Mr. Decary to Mr. Higgitt as follows:

Q. Now we have produced yesterday, under objection from your attorneys, a document P-142, exhibit P-142. Now this is a letter addressed by the Honourable Warren Allmand to Mr. Allan Lawrence, MP but I forget for what riding?

A. I believe it's an Ontario member.

Q. Yes, an Ontario member for the Conservative Party of Canada I believe. I refer specifically, and you may take time and a moment or two to look at the

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document, but I refer you to the last paragraph of page two (2) of Mr. Allmand's letter?

A. Yes.

Then a question by Mr. Pierre Lamontagne:

Q. If you take the position that we're dealing with foreign powers—

A. I have read this document.

I think this answers the hon. member's question.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. In any case, the discussion will obviously be interrupted by the luncheon adjournment. We are going to return to this at two o'clock.

It being one o'clock, I do now leave the chair until two o'clock this afternoon.

At 1.04 p.m. the House took recess.

[Translation]

AFTER RECESS

The House resumed at 2 p.m.

Mr. Pinard: Mr. Speaker, when I was speaking at one o'clock I saw fit at the very beginning of my intervention to rectify a fact which undoubtedly the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) inadvertently brought to our attention. Though that has been clearly settled, I would like to make brief and clearer statements on that issue.

If we accepted the arguments given by the two members of the Progressive Conservative party and the member of the New Democratic Party who spoke before me, we would have to conclude that it is not because there is a royal commission of inquiry considering the practices of the RCMP that a committee of the House cannot study matters which are already the subject of the inquiry of the commission when privileges of members of the House are concerned. If we were to accept that assertion—which I do not—we would have to come to the necessary conclusion, in light of obvious facts, that the question of privilege as raised by the hon. member for Northumberland-Durham (Mr. Lawrence) was belated. It is belated because it is based first of all on a letter dated December 1973, one excerpt of which was quoted by the hon. member this morning. This excerpt has also been quoted by me when I read the wording of a question put to the Keable inquiry and which establishes clearly that the then solicitor general did inform the hon. member that the RCMP had advised him it was not current practice to open mail. Now, in 1973 the hon. member got that information which turned out to be erroneous. But last November, in 1977, in the House and more specifically during almost all the oral question period on November 9, it was clearly established, following a TV coverage from the night before, that there had been allegedly illegal mail opening.