

Solicitor General. I have the responsibility for responding to this statement which was received by our party at approximately 2.15 p.m. today, and I want to say something about that to the Solicitor General as well as the way in which he deals with this House.

The government House leader talks about taking up the time of the House and the apparent interest in this debate, but then allows the Solicitor General to make a statement on motions that will take up one hour of the time of this important debate. Important as his statement is, it could have been made at a later date. I think the first thing the government House leader should have done was ask that the time taken by this statement on motions be added on tonight. He could make a specific motion rather than sitting there in a cloak of sanctimony. If the statement is to be made, and if we are to give the national unity debate priority the government House leader should rise and ask that whatever time is used for the statement be added to the time for debate.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The Solicitor General.

Mr. Clark: What a spent Canada.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[Translation]

ROYAL CANADIAN MOUNTED POLICE

ESTABLISHMENT OF COMMITTEE TO EXAMINE UNAUTHORIZED ACTS

Hon. Francis Fox (Solicitor General): Mr. Speaker, I thought very sincerely that the statement I am about to make would be of interest not only to the House but also to the general public, and I think it is important to proceed with this as soon as possible. Of course, Mr. Speaker, I am going to talk about a subject on which my colleagues are extremely well informed, and I think that the whole thing will require a minimum of time if there is some good will on all sides.

[English]

On June 17 last, I informed the House that the government had seriously considered the setting up of a Royal Commission of Inquiry in March, 1976 when, for the first time, the government was informed of the participation of the RCMP in the unlawful entry of the premises occupied by L'Agence de Presse Libre du Quebec, in October 1972. The Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) and the then Solicitor General received at that time repeated and unequivocal assurances from the RCMP that the APLQ incident was exceptional and isolated and consequently there was no need of a commission of inquiry. The government eventually decided, as I previously informed the House, not to establish a commission of inquiry. The government remained firmly committed, however, to re-examining the need for a commission of inquiry after the judicial processes, more particularly the investigation initiated by the

Royal Canadian Mounted Police

Quebec authorities and the court proceedings that could follow, had run their normal course.

• (1520)

Since making my statement in the House concerning the APLQ incident, allegations have been made that members of the RCMP, and more particularly members of the security service, have, on other occasions, been involved in unlawful actions in the discharge of their duties. The APLQ incident, according to those who made the allegations, was not of an isolated and exceptional character as I had reported in my statement of June 17.

These allegations received our immediate attention. At my request, the deputy solicitor general of Canada and the assistant attorney general, criminal law, personally met with some of the individuals who made these allegations. In addition, I asked the Commissioner of the RCMP to undertake the investigations which were warranted. He later informed me, after having made preliminary inquiries, that some of these allegations might well have some basis in fact. According to the commissioner, it would appear that some members of the RCMP in the discharge of their responsibility to protect national security could well have used methods or could have been involved in actions which were neither authorized nor provided for by law. As a result, the commissioner has modified his position and has recommended that the government establish a commission of inquiry into the operations and the policies of the RCMP security service, on a national basis.

[Translation]

In the circumstances, Mr. Speaker, and considering these new developments, the government has decided to establish an inquiry commission composed of three members who will be responsible for determining the scope and frequency of inquiry practices and other activities which are not permitted or provided for in the law, involving members of the RCMP, and for examining the policies and procedures regulating RCMP activities in their task, which consists in protecting the country and ensuring its security.

It is necessary, for the good administration of the RCMP, that all the light be shed on charges of unlawfulness that have already been made as well as on all other allegations of the same nature which might follow. That, Mr. Speaker, will be one of the important tasks entrusted to the commission set up by the government. After the light has been shed on these incidents which may be drawn to the attention of the commission, the decisions called for will unfold as they should in each particular case, in close co-operation, if need be, with the responsible authorities. But beyond particular incidents which might be brought before the commission, it is important to think about the lessons to be learned for the future. That is why the government has asked the commission's advice in terms of policies and procedures that govern or should govern RCMP activities in the accomplishment of their task, namely to see to the protection and the security of the country, of necessary mechanisms for implementing these policies and procedures, and finally of the amendments to the legislation