

Morality in Government

entirely different thing for the Prime Minister of the country to go on a fishing expedition, to be poking through the political garbage cans of this country to see whether he can find something which has an unpleasant odour in connection with the public actions of members of this parliament. I say this is a very dangerous precedent which the Prime Minister has established by his speech today.

If the amendment is refuted, does it mean that this House of Commons is giving its assent to a new principle in government? Does it mean that future Prime Ministers will upon taking office have the full assent of parliament in instructing the head of the mounted police to begin curry combing the files to see whether he can find some morsel of gossip or some peccadillo which the Prime Minister can keep up his sleeve for future use?

I am sure the house is fully seized of the importance of the issue at stake. We have always prided ourselves, living in a democracy, that the administration of justice and the functioning of the police were free from political interference and partisanship—that if some person has committed a wrong the R.C.M.P. will consult the law officers to see whether or not they have a prima facie case. And if they have sufficient evidence to warrant the laying of charges, the person so charged will have the opportunity to defend himself in court through the due processes of law.

The moment we begin to destroy this basic principle of democracy, the moment we allow a prime minister, no matter who he may be or what party he heads, to begin collecting R.C.M.P. files for his own use, at his own discretion, we have taken the first step toward establishing a police state in this country.

I want to conclude by saying that I do not accuse the Prime Minister of lying. I am prepared to accept the statement he made this afternoon. I am saying that on the basis of his own statement as to the instructions he gave to the R.C.M.P. commissioner, he erred in giving those instructions and made a most unhappy departure from the long established principles of democratic government.

I want to say to the Prime Minister, or to his colleagues who can convey this to him, that if he is prepared to rise before this vote is taken and apologize to the house for the instructions he gave, and assure the house that this practice will not be followed and

that his apology will constitute a precedent against any future prime minister following such a course of action, then I am quite prepared to see this amendment dropped. But if the Prime Minister is not prepared to do this, I say that on the basis of his own statement to the house this afternoon he stands condemned of having given instructions for an investigation into the lives and activities of members of parliament which, if allowed to stand, will do irreparable damage to the democratic form of government in Canada.

Mr. R. N. Thompson (Red Deer): Not having had an opportunity to take part in this debate, particularly following the participation in it by the Prime Minister this afternoon, when he gave his explanation of the events which led to the charges contained in the amendment before us, I am grateful for the few moments available to me at the present time to set out the position of the Social Credit party.

I believe that we as members of parliament ought to be more concerned with this debate than with any debate which has arisen for a long time. It is not just parliament which is at the heart of this issue; it is the rights and responsibilities of every member of this house.

In the first instance, the principle stated in the amendment is a vital and basic principle of parliament. In my opinion it is not the prerogative of the Prime Minister or of any member of the government to peruse R.C.M.P. files or reports relating to members of this house, nor is it the responsibility of the R.C.M.P. to provide such information to the government about the past or present conduct of members.

There may be two important exceptions—one, where there is a question of the security of the nation being involved, and the other where there has been some transgression of the Criminal Code. In either case the R.C.M.P. must report to the Minister of Justice, or, under the new organization of government, to the Solicitor General. If the government or any of its members fail to observe these basic principles then, truly, the useful existence of every member of parliament will have been destroyed and the institution of parliament itself undermined.

We must therefore support the principle set out in this amendment, that is to say, that the R.C.M.P. shall not be used by any member of