

Higgitt said before the Keable commission is quite different from what he said subsequently before the McDonald commission.

I draw the attention of the House to page 62 of the Keable report, which was previously referred to by the parliamentary secretary. It reads as follows:

Q. 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."

We are all agreed on that quotation. It continues:

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

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

If one follows the argument of the private secretary, why should my colleague have taken from that evidence that the letter was wrong? All the commissioner indicated was that he had no conversation. The report continues, with Mr. Pierre Lamontagne asking the following question:

While we are on that letter, Mr. Higgitt, there has been a suggestion made this morning by Mr. Cameron that very frequently the Department of the Solicitor General, whoever Mr. Cameron or somebody else, would ask the RCMP not only for an answer but also for a draft reply. Looking at that letter which has two (2) pages, exhibit P-142, could you tell us if according to your knowledge the practice in all this, the setup of letters etc. of the RCMP, if that draft was prepared by the RCMP?

Commissioner Higgitt's answer was as follows:

I would say with absolute . . . or with almost positive certainty that this was not prepared by the RCMP and I say that because of the phraseology. I say it also because of the setup of the letter itself. The RCMP did not set up letters in that nature and I would say from this superficial look that it is most unlikely that the RCMP had any part in actually writing that—

The next page was not given to me. In that part of the Keable evidence, Commissioner Higgitt again makes it clear that in his view—and he said that it was a superficial one—it was not drafted by the RCMP. My colleague had absolutely no reason to feel that the letter was in any way misleading, based on the evidence given before the Keable commission and referred to by the parliamentary secretary.

I should like to refer to the point raised by the parliamentary secretary initially concerning evidence in this House. In your remarks to the hon. member for Yukon (Mr. Nielsen), Your Honour made specific reference to this. I am referring to the November 9 testimony of the then solicitor general of Canada. The parliamentary secretary referred to an answer given to the hon. member for Northumberland-Durham, but he did not refer to an earlier answer given by the solicitor general in response to a question posed by the hon. member for Central Nova. At that time the then solicitor general said the following:

In some instances, after my examination of the files with senior officers of the Crown, it clearly happened that the mail has actually been opened by the RCMP security service. Because of that, I referred the whole matter to the Attorney General of Canada and also to the McDonald royal commission of inquiry.

*Privilege—Mr. Lawrence*

● (1452)

I would make two comments in regard to that answer. First, if I had been in my colleague's shoes it would have registered with me that the solicitor general had said, "in some instances". He did not say "in all instances". I would suggest he did not make any more meaningful comment than to say, "Yes, I have found instances where letters have been opened".

The second thing he said, which I think was very reassuring, was, "I have referred it to the Attorney General of Canada and to the McDonald commission". Is it not a natural thing to expect a member of this House to presume that any matter he had raised, such as the letter before us, would be looked into and, if found to be one of the instances when in fact there was an interception of the mail, it would be corrected and that correction referred back to him?

I would strengthen that argument, Mr. Speaker, with the fact that my colleague then did get up and in his question asked the minister why he evaded the question, and why he could not be more specific. It was then that the solicitor general came back and said essentially the same thing. He said:

—it became very clear to me during the course of that meeting that there had been indeed a number of instances in which the security service of the RCMP in particular areas of counterespionage, terrorism and countersubversion opened a number of pieces of mail.

Again, I would suggest there was nothing other than a general comment there. There was nothing to cause my colleague to suddenly think, "Well, I must have been misled in the letter I received sometime ago from that solicitor general."

I would then suggest, Mr. Speaker, that if you review the testimony before the McDonald commission, and I believe my colleague has already put some of this before you, you will find at page 14555 Commissioner Higgitt for the first time refers specifically to this letter, and for the first time indicates there was wrong information in it. That is the point on which I believe this all turns. This is the first time the letter we have under consideration was specifically identified as a letter that fell within a situation which in fact had involved mail tampering, and in turn my colleague learned for the first time that the letter he had received was presumably misleading.

I hope I have made that clear, because I think what the parliamentary secretary said has clouded the issue somewhat. The hard truth is there has been absolutely no reason why my colleague or anybody else in this House who has made any specific request concerning the possibility of the interception of mail should have had his fears aroused in the sense that he had been misled, other than in the case of my colleague, the hon. member for Northumberland-Durham, as a result of Commissioner Higgitt's testimony before the McDonald commission, to which I have referred.

In this context, Mr. Speaker, let me ask you, if I may, to think of the almost impossible situation in which it would put all members of this House if it were otherwise. Surely there can be no suggestion that if general comments are made by ministers that would lead one to believe they may have made misstatements in the past, without any specific indication of