

Montreal Break-In

Mr. Boulanger: That's a good idea.

Mr. Forrestall: Sooner or later the government has got to be told to wake up and be aware. There are those of us in this country who reject the presence of the Canadian Armed Forces in our penitentiaries, for example, for the purposes of quelling riots, or for the purpose of serving one social will over another. If that is the acceptable thing, then we should change the role of the Canadian military in our society and our structure. But we should do it openly and do it through dialogue.

I think this is an appropriate time to say these things. It is early in the morning. There is probably nobody in the press gallery. There are certainly very few people in the public galleries.

Obviously there is nobody here of any great consequence. Prosper keeps lecturing us. The Solicitor General keeps smiling. The distinguished sailor from Saskatchewan, the hon. member for Assiniboia (Mr. Goodale), for whom I have great personal respect, keeps smiling.

In conclusion, we must be very careful in our inner circles, in our very private circles, in our very inner sanctuaries, or whatever they are called, where we make public decisions, that we do not remove our capacity to get at decisions about the security of our country and the methods by which we continue to ensure that the security of our country is under control or in good hands. We must be very careful about the degree to which we use the Canadian military in that pursuit because, to the degree that we do, we impair national unity in the final analysis. This does not enhance it.

● (0230)

I should like to give a scenario or two for the Solicitor General but might come dangerously close to saying things I should not. However, I am sufficiently concerned about the debates of the last two or three years to say to the minister that I deplore the degree to which he has impaired the reputation and the capacity of our national police force to be an effective security and intelligence group within our nation.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please. The hon. Solicitor General (Mr. Fox) on a point of order.

Mr. Fox: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate and understand the very real concern the hon. member has in these areas, and the great expertise he has which has benefited the House over the years particularly in the area of defence. I wish to assure him there is no malicious abuse by the government of the role of the security services. I think a great part of the debate today has centered around some suggestion by members opposite that there was insufficient control. If that is the general view of hon. members opposite I assume there would not be, as a corollary, any wilful abuse.

Mr. Perrin Beatty (Wellington-Grey-Dufferin-Waterloo): Mr. Speaker, I wonder if I might prevail upon my colleagues

[Mr. Forrestall.]

for two or three minutes to pose a couple of questions to the minister, if he would consent to answer them. I had hoped to have the opportunity to ask them—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please. The minister has already spoken so he cannot answer questions. The only thing the hon. member can do is contribute to the debate.

Mr. Beatty: Perhaps I could then put two or three rhetorical questions that the minister or any member of the government might answer. They were not answered during the debate.

One of the distressing aspects of this is that so much of the government's case has centered upon the fact that the former solicitor general felt it should be self-evident that it was not necessary to reply to the letter he received requesting information about whether the RCMP had been involved in the break-in. He indicated that any member of the House would have reacted in the same way. According to the statement made by the present Solicitor General (Mr. Fox) last Friday, however, the letter was sent to the former solicitor general on October 11, 1972. It was brought to the attention of the RCMP by the assistant to the minister, Lieutenant Colonel John R. Cameron, in order that a reply could be prepared for the solicitor general's signature.

After that letter was sent to the RCMP on October 26, 1972, the RCMP wrote to the minister's assistant recommending that no acknowledgment be made, without providing reasons for that recommendation. The question I should like to leave in the air this evening, and perhaps pursue at a later date with the minister, is whether he has personally seen that exchange of correspondence between the assistant to the solicitor general and the RCMP. I note that the minister nods his head in assent. If he has seen it, would he be prepared to inform the House who the official was who signed the letter to the then solicitor general on behalf of the RCMP, recommending that no reply be made to the letter to the solicitor general?

Next, I wonder if the Solicitor General would be prepared to bring copies of the correspondence to the House tomorrow to be tabled so that it would be on the public record.

The reason this information is so important is that each of us receives correspondence from individuals and organizations every day. There may be instances when we feel it is improper for us to give a complete reply to questions asked, perhaps because matters are before the courts or we do not have the relevant information. As a matter of procedure, however, virtually any member would at least do any individual or group who wrote the courtesy of explaining why an answer would not be forthcoming.

If, as the Minister of Supply and Services (Mr. Goyer) indicated, the reason he did not write was that the Minister of Justice in Quebec, Mr. Choquette, had stated publicly that the RCMP was not involved and that he accepted Mr. Choquette's statement, I would be curious to know why he did not write back to the organization and say that the Minister of Justice in Quebec had looked into the matter and determined there was no involvement by the federal police force and that he could answer categorically that that was not the case. If his concern