

Alert Service Correspondence with R.C.M.P.

Mr. Macdonald: I pointed out to the hon. member that I cannot from my own personal knowledge answer that particular question. I also pointed out to him that as a general principle it would not be desirable to submit the material to the type of cross-examination which might be involved in questions of that kind.

Mr. Scott: Would the hon. gentleman permit one further question? Would he undertake to familiarize himself with the correspondence and give the hon. member for Port Arthur his answer on another day? We could adjourn the debate in the interval?

Mr. Macdonald: I am prepared to consider that suggestion but I feel on the basis of general principle it would not be desirable for me to set a precedent, or for hon. members to set a precedent, which would require someone in my position to go back and examine a document, to speak to the police about this, and come back to the house with excerpts from it or conclusions or statements made on it. I would go on the general principle that it would be against the public interest for this particular statement to be produced in parliament.

Mr. G. H. Aiken (Parry Sound-Muskoka): I just wish to make a few comments in connection with this motion. I should like first of all to say that the question of discretion as to what if any information in the files of the mounted police is made available, should be left to the Minister of Justice and the R.C.M.P. I realize the hon. member for Port Arthur has raised a somewhat novel point. He wants one way correspondence to be given without necessarily the replies. Yet I think it is the old case of being unable to confirm or deny that certain information exists because, in such confirmation or denial, important admissions might be made.

I will admit that during the last year there have been certain apparent shortcomings in the security system of the R.C.M.P. These have been shown in several cases which have been brought before the house. I think such shortcomings are natural under a system such as ours and under the system under which the R.C.M.P. operate. They do not operate in a world of facts. They operate in a world of suggestion, conclusion and even inference, which is repugnant to a good many of our basic concepts. Yet when it comes down to a fine point we have to accept this system as preferable to having no proper security, or insufficient security in this country. There is a very fine line between what can be revealed and what cannot be admitted, and that line we cannot here undertake to

define. I believe that definition must be left in the hands of that authority.

In this particular case I would expect the R.C.M.P. would not give the information requested by the hon. member. In all conscience I would not expect them to do so. I believe that what the hon. member is getting at is that the R.C.M.P. may be using this agency in order to get certain names put before the public, which it cannot do itself.

Mr. Fisher: And which it will not give to us.

Mr. Aiken: And which it will not give to anyone, and for which it will not accept responsibility because it is based on this very realm of suspicion, of consequential facts of evidence gathered up, which is not always conclusive. If this is the case, and we can only speculate about it, I would not expect the mounted police to admit it, nor would I expect they would deny it. I do not know how we could expect an answer to this particular question. We must, of course, always be alert and see that individual cases of hardship and of unjust suspicion must be cleared up, which in our free society can be followed up, so that the names of certain innocent individuals who are suspected are cleared. These are cases of recognized publications. I know of one which the hon. member referred to, a publication called "Northern Neighbours". It happens to be published in the community in which I reside, and it is no secret that it is a communist publication. Neither is it any secret that it is published in my area, and I must admit I get a lot of letters about it. Nevertheless I do not suppose that even if the mounted police were asked about this publication they would include it in a list. I have no hesitation in stating here that this is a communist newspaper, is accepted as such, and is in fact published under the sponsorship of the communist party of Canada. I do not think it is an illegal publication; if it were illegal it would not be published. Nevertheless I feel we cannot go into this situation by expecting an answer, which would open the door to a good many more. I sympathize with the objective of the hon. member in keeping alert—

Mr. Fisher: Could I just ask a question. Would the hon. member condone the activity of the R.C.M.P. in providing an agency such as this, which it calls reputable, with a list of subversive organizations for publication while at the same time the R.C.M.P., through the Minister of Justice, refuses to acknowledge that there really is such a list or that it should

[Mr. Fisher.]