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Passion for secrecy denies public's right to the truth

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What is going on here?

A routine, innocuous letter from RCMP intelligence chief Mike Dare to Col. Robin Bourne, chairman of the government's security advisory committee, has caused a storm worthy of a top-secret state document.

The letter, marked "confidential" — the second lowest level of classification, and which is often treated quite casually — merely reported that the RCMP was to be subject to new

guidelines for investigating the Parti Quebecois. There would be no routine checks except, of course, where something like terrorist activity or collaboration with a foreign power was involved.

It went on to say that consequently the RCMP could no longer be expected to provide the kind of (routine) information called for by the interdepartmental committee on security and intelligence (ICSI) guidelines. Obviously the latter had to be altered to conform with cabinet policy.

There doesn't seem to be much mystery in that. The government's policy — that screening should apply only to terrorists and subversives, rather than all separatists — is consistent with the principles governing civil rights. And Gen. Dare's desire to have the internal regulations conform with government policy is a logical consequence.

Peter Worthington, executive editor of the *Toronto Sun*, suggested editorially that mention of the prime minister's name in the Dare letter confirmed that the PM and not the solicitor-general runs RCMP security.

In respect of policy, that is a political fact of life, but it is not new. The prime minister, as chairman of the cabinet committee on security and intelligence, has always been No. 1 on that totem pole.

Worthington also suggested that by issuing the guidelines, the PM "personally has made it easier for separatists to subvert Confederation and break up Canada from within."

I disagree with that interpretation. If anything, I suspect that the opposite would be the PM's plan.

In *Cite Libre*, his intellectual magazine of the late 1950s and early 1960s, the prime minister established two points very clearly. He is a *gauchiste* (leftist) and anti-separatist (federalist). And there is no solid evidence, and certainly no indication from the man himself, that his views have altered much on either point.

He was quite in character a few days ago when he told a group of visiting businessmen that "separatism is dead in Quebec."

While any Quebec-watcher might question the basis of his judgment — especially if compared with his earlier economic pronouncement that "We have inflation licked" — there is little doubt that he wishes it were so. Not only is separatism a threat to foreign investment, which he doesn't want completely cut off, but to the continuation of Canada itself and the PM's own power base in the event the *pequistes* do well at the next provincial election.