

Jules, May 12 - 1964

Fisher under attack as scandal-monger

By Tim Creery

Southam News Service

OTTAWA — A young parliamentary secretary has unleashed a blistering attack on Douglas Fisher for the MP-columnist's journalistic hatchet job on Prime Minister Pearson.

John Munro, 33, Liberal MP for Hamilton East and parliamentary secretary to National Health and Welfare Minister Judy LaMarsh, also took a crack at colleagues who had told Mr. Fisher tales out of party caucus. Munro was speaking to a local service club (Carleton Optimist Club).

In his syndicated column Fisher said Mr. Pearson should be replaced as Liberal party leader and prime minister by External Affairs and Commerce Minister Sharp.

Fisher said alternative leadership should be considered "before he has compromised and delayed the federal government into an even worse inertia than his predecessor (Mr. Diefenbaker) managed in a much longer time."

Fisher picked out Pearson's handling in Parliament of the pension plan, redistribution, the flag and magazine protective legislation for particular condemnation. The MP-columnist, who is also deputy leader of the New Democratic Party, said he had been able to confirm from Liberal MP's that Mr. Pearson had told a party caucus last week that he did not know what to do about the magazine legislation.

"Would any Canadian for a minute think of entrusting our country's affairs to Mr. Fisher?" said Munro. "The immediate reaction is, 'of course not'. Why?"

"Instinctively we know that Canadians have little respect for a disseminator of gossip — no respect for such a man, as a man or as a legislator; even more so, when his columns are motivated by a hatred, ill disguised — aimed

to destroy and lacking in fundamental decency."

Munro, in a text distributed to the press, suggested Fisher launched his attack because "the prime minister has shown that he abundantly possesses that quality that enables him to earn the personal respect of political friend and critic alike.

"... Could it be that Mr. Fisher's recent activities are nothing but the bitter infuriation of a man who has so wantonly, foolishly and perhaps irretrievably dissipated the very talents upon which that (Pearson's) type of respect depends?"

Munro said that "the most potent and tasty food for Mr. Fisher's appetite is that gossip that we as members and as individuals indulge in all too frequently."

The attack on Fisher was part of a larger theme in which Munro suggested that parliament depends for its effectiveness on the self-discipline of MP's and parties, as much as on reform of rules and procedures.

He suggested that MP's blabbing caucus secrets to the press was a main cause of parliamentary ineffectiveness.

"The breakdown of the caucus as an institution is symptomatic of a breakdown of party discipline and all that that entails," he said.

Munro's speech had hardly been distributed before Fisher was back in full cry in the extra-parliamentary debate.

"I'm flattered by Mr. Munro's comments," he said in a press statement. "Obviously my criticisms of Mr. Pearson's inadequacies are rankling. Parliament can never be a healthy institution with the kind of leadership he gives it."

Munro said Fisher was "aided every so often by the power to instil honest fear among his colleagues."

Fisher retorted: "A great majority of politicians are decent persons and to suggest they live in fear of me is an insult to them."