

Oral Questions

Mr. Laprise: Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask a supplementary question.

Since those farmers are threatening to hire only Mexican workers if they have to comply with Canadian legislation, could the minister tell us whether foreign workers are bound by the same rules as Canadians or whether there are agreements between Canada and Mexico or Portugal providing that cheap seasonal labour can be imported?

Mr. Guay (St. Boniface): Mr. Speaker, I think the legislation concerning my department is very specific in that case. If there is anything else I might bring to the hon. member's attention, I would do so when I answer his question.

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[English]

ROYAL CANADIAN MOUNTED POLICE

PROPOSED REFERENCE TO COMMITTEE OF ALLEGED ILLEGAL ACTIVITIES

Mr. Walter Baker (Grenville-Carleton): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the Solicitor General. Aside from the difference of view with respect to the terms of reference of the commission, which I think could be settled by a willing Solicitor General enlarging them, does the hon. gentleman not agree that perhaps events have now overtaken the royal commission which, according to the chairman, cannot begin serious investigation work until January.

Some hon. Members: November!

Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton): Perhaps the Solicitor General owes the country the obligation of recommending the formation of a committee which could work quickly and properly and begin the process in this place. In these circumstances is the Solicitor General prepared to agree to the designation of a committee of this House as was suggested by me this morning and by one of his own hon. friends yesterday, the hon. member for Windsor-Walkerville, albeit on different terms, to bring the issue into the House of Commons so that the investigation could proceed in a way which would not interfere with the business before us with respect to other matters?

Hon. Francis Fox (Solicitor General): Mr. Speaker, the opinions of the hon. member and the leader of the New Democratic Party reflect, I suppose, a very strong desire on his side, indeed, on both sides of the House, to see the royal commission of inquiry begin its work as soon as possible. We are talking about matters which do, indeed, concern the national security of this country; we are talking about evidence which has to be taken under oath; we are talking about proceedings in the course of which witnesses have to be heard in detail with an opportunity provided for cross-examination, and I still believe that the proper forum is a royal commission of inquiry. However, in view of the strong expressions of opinion in the House today, I would wish to draw the attention of the chairman of the royal commission to what has been said

in the hope that he will be able to get the inquiry under way earlier than has so far been indicated.

Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton): Mr. Speaker, the question the Canadian people are really asking now, is: Who is in charge? Is it the government of the day which is in charge and which has neglected its responsibility with respect to the matter? Are these issues to go before a royal commission or is the place for the investigation not to be here where witnesses can be called, where evidence can be taken in camera, where witnesses can be cross-examined and the whole examination take place more quickly than anywhere else? Would the minister not reconsider his position with respect to his unwillingness to refer this matter to a special committee of this House, or, as his hon. friend has suggested, to the Standing Committee on Justice and Legal Affairs?

Mr. Fox: I listened to the hon. member and the leader of his party in the course of the month of June. On a number of occasions they made motions under Standing Order 43 recommending very strongly that a royal commission of inquiry be set up. We have heeded their argument to a certain extent. We were not convinced at that time that it was necessary, but later we became convinced it was necessary to establish some forum in which an impartial inquiry could take place into the practices and procedures of the security service. At the moment, the hon. member has reversed his stand completely. Three or four months ago he had complete confidence in a royal commission of inquiry. Today he says the matter cannot be properly handled by a royal commission. I wish he would make up his mind.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton): The minister is quite right. In June of 1977, when we were not aware of a whole series of events, a royal commission did seem appropriate. Circumstances have now changed, however; there has been a long series of allegations of illegalities and in view of this change in circumstances, in view of the doubt expressed as to the credibility of the government and of the RCMP, I would ask the Solicitor General to seriously reconsider the position the government is taking and to look to a quick, and, I would hope, a reasonable and proper settlement in what is, after all, the highest court in this country, namely, the Canadian Parliament, as the proper place for an examination by one of its committees of all the issues involved here, because the bottom line of all this is the political and ministerial accountability of the government.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Fox: The hon. member has just stated that when he knew nothing about the situation he wanted a royal commission of inquiry. I think the real bottom line of this thing is the national security of our country.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gillies: Don't you care about the people?