

Inquiries of the Ministry

Now, I do not think I can add anything to the statement that was made at that time beyond pointing out that if any attorney general is of a different opinion as to the desirability of prosecutions being instituted he has it within his jurisdiction to take action; and if any Canadian citizen felt that he should make a charge it is within his right under our system of laws to make that charge. The Department of Justice has in certain cases taken the initiative because it felt that not only had there been a violation of a statute but that it was an instance where it was in the public interest that the department should step in and start prosecution.

Here the department has not come to the conclusion that, under the whole of the circumstances, it was desirable that it should do so, but it has done nothing to prevent anyone else from so doing if anyone else is otherwise advised.

Mr. Drew: Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Speaker: Order. Before the leader of the opposition replies may I say there is nothing before the house at the present time. I did not interrupt the leader of the opposition before as I gathered it was the wish of the house that he should continue. If he would like to ask some questions I think I should allow him to do so but, unless there is unanimous consent of the house, I cannot allow debate on this subject at this time.

Mr. Drew: It was not with the thought of debate, it was simply to point out to the Prime Minister that I had not overlooked the responsibility of provincial attorneys general. After all, I have had occasion to consider their responsibilities from time to time.

I point out that at the time Gouzenko's evidence laid the foundation for charges against men who were serving the same master and for the same purpose the dominion government did not hesitate to take action. There is nothing to prevent the Department of Justice from acting in a matter of national concern, and I do believe this is a matter of national concern whether the decision is to proceed or not.

Mr. Diefenbaker: I asked the Prime Minister a question which has never been answered. It was not a question whether or not it is desirable to prosecute, but did the law officers of the crown give the opinion that, having regard to what Endicott has done, an offence could conceivably have been committed under any section of the treason and sedition laws as they are today? That was the question. It was not a question of policy or desirability, but is the law sufficient as it now exists to cover activities—I was going to say treason-

able activities but it is not for me to judge—such as Endicott and those associated with him are today perpetrating in this country?

That was the question I asked the attorney general and that is the question I would like to ask the Prime Minister. What was the opinion of the law officers if all these facts were established? Would there or would there not be an offence?

Mr. St. Laurent: Mr. Speaker, I do not know what opinions the law officers may have given the Minister of Justice. I remember, as my hon. friend does, how the late beloved member of this house, Mr. Tommy Church, used to object to any legal opinion being given in the house by the Department of Justice.

Now, I can give my own opinion. I think, personally, that if what I believe to be true and what the hon. leader of the opposition believes to be true could be legally proved before the courts there is ample provision in the Criminal Code to warrant conviction.

FISHERIES

NEW BRUNSWICK—STORM DAMAGE

On the orders of the day:

Mr. Albany M. Robichaud (Gloucester): May I be permitted to ask a question of the hon. Minister of Fisheries. I think I should say that not being accustomed to parliamentary procedure I have not given him the usual notice. My question is a general one, so perhaps he will entertain it.

I have read in several newspapers—

Some hon. Members: Question.

Mr. Robichaud: My question is: Are there any plans under consideration by the minister's department to come to the assistance of the fishermen of the province of New Brunswick who have suffered losses?

Hon. R. W. Mayhew (Minister of Fisheries): Mr. Speaker, the province of New Brunswick has not made any claim for assistance. I suppose the hon. member is referring to storm damage, and we have had no submission from the province of New Brunswick asking for assistance.

REDISTRIBUTION

READJUSTMENT OF REPRESENTATION IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

Hon. W. E. Harris (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration) moved the third reading of Bill No. 393, to readjust the representation in the House of Commons.

Mr. George A. Drew (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, unless the government at this stage decides to reconsider its