

Oral Questions

House other than to say that an investigation is proceeding. Under those circumstances, I am sure members of the House can well appreciate that at this stage in the investigation, in any event, no further comment should be made than that.

POWERS OF RCMP IN MATTERS CONCERNING NATIONAL SECURITY

Mr. Mark MacGuigan (Windsor-Walkerville): Mr. Speaker, my question is also for the Solicitor General and Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs. Last week, he assured the House unequivocally that it was his policy to maintain the paramountcy of the rule of law. On Thursday night, he told the Standing Committee on Justice and Legal Affairs that it was his understanding that the Prime Minister's position was the same as his own. However, in his press conference on Friday morning, the Prime Minister reasserted his campaign view that the RCMP ought to be given extraordinary powers in national security matters.

In light of this statement by the Prime Minister, may I ask the minister what his understanding now is of his government's policy, or is he having as much trouble as the rest of us in understanding what it is?

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Allan Lawrence (Solicitor General and Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs): Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member has some difficulty understanding these matters, I can assure him that I do not.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Lawrence: I think the views of the Prime Minister and mine are exactly the same, namely, that at all times the police and everyone else should act under the law and pay close attention to the law.

Mr. Lalonde: Careful.

Mr. Lawrence: Certainly, those whom we all expect to uphold the law should be the very ones who should pay as much attention if not more attention to it than anyone else. I think, as well, the Prime Minister's views are exactly the same as mine, that under certain circumstances the law should be changed to permit the proper fulfilment of the duties and responsibilities we expect of law enforcement agencies in this country.

● (1440)

Mr. MacGuigan: Mr. Speaker, the Solicitor General and Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs knows, or ought to know, that his answer is entirely irrelevant because what the Prime Minister is talking about is not a change in the substance of the criminal law which might maintain the rule of law; it is a change in the procedure on an ad hoc basis. That is what the Prime Minister said.

An hon. Member: No.

[Mr. Lawrence.]

Mr. MacGuigan: He said so. Will the Solicitor General and Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs not join the hon. member for Peace River in upholding the rule of law?

Mr. Lawrence: Mr. Speaker, I think I know what the hon. member for Peace River believes, and I think what he believes is exactly the same as I believe and exactly the same as the Prime Minister believes, that in certain instances the present law that we have suffered under the previous administration should be changed.

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ADMINISTRATION OF JUSTICE

MINISTER AUTHORIZING ILLEGAL ACTIVITY—POSITION OF PRIME MINISTER

Hon. J.-J. Blais (Nipissing): Mr. Speaker, the question I asked the hon. gentleman on Wednesday elicited what I felt was a commendable reply for a former attorney general of the province of Ontario, and one of great repute. When the question was asked, it was specifically with reference to the well publicized position of the Prime Minister to the effect that he would agree to a minister of the Crown authorizing illegal activity on an ad hoc basis. The reply of the hon. gentleman in this House to that question was that he was not considering that, and he was in fact respectful of the rule of law and would seek to have it implemented and protected.

My question to the hon. gentleman is, in view of the dispute there is between himself and the Prime Minister, what measures is he contemplating now in order to protect the rule of law, which is in dire need of protection now, having heard what the Prime Minister has said? Is he considering going to the ultimate position of resigning his position in order to protect that principle?

Hon. Allan Lawrence (Solicitor General and Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs): If I was considering resigning my position, believe me, it would not be because of a dispute of that nature between the Prime Minister and myself, because basically we believe the same thing.

There is no question in my mind that the law, as it is written today, should be obeyed by everyone. There is also no question in my mind, and I believe no question in the Prime Minister's mind, that the law should be changed in certain instances so that law enforcement agencies of this country, not just the RCMP, would have better means and better armament legally to do some of the things they should be permitted to do.

Mr. Blais: Mr. Speaker, I would just like the hon. gentleman to review what has been said. If he will understand that what the Prime Minister is advancing is not really the rule of law or activity under the rule of law, but basically arbitrary decisions being made by a politician in a political context without any guidelines being enacted and identified in a given statute—and that is exactly what the Prime Minister was referring to—surely he will know that is not a position a man with the hon. gentleman's experience is able to support.