

Oral Questions

Government. On September 2, with the announcement of the appointment of curators for the two banks, she announced specific measures to strengthen the Canada Deposit Insurance Corporation's powers of inspection. I should also inform the Hon. Member that steps have been under way for a while now to add to the staff of the Inspector General's office, and that goes back to the middle of the summer.

COMMISSION'S TERMS OF REFERENCE

Hon. Herb Gray (Windsor West): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Deputy Prime Minister. In the Prime Minister's statement announcing the appointment of the Estey Commission the Prime Minister says in part:

Mr. Justice Estey will examine all circumstances and factors... including regulatory and administrative action taken by the Government of Canada with respect to these institutions.

Can the Deputy Prime Minister explain why the actual terms of reference in the Order in Council setting up the Commission authorize the Commissioner to look into and report on the state of affairs surrounding the cessation of operations of the two banks only with respect to the regulatory action taken by the Government of Canada and its agencies? The word "administrative" appears nowhere in that connection.

Hon. Michael Wilson (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, if we are going to get into a reading of the specific terms of the Order in Council, it says:

—to inquire into and report on the state of affairs surrounding the cessation of operations of the Canadian Commercial Bank and the Northland Bank—

Those are very broad terms of reference which provide the Commissioner with tremendous scope to explore any elements of the situation which he feels are appropriate. Then there are some specific references, as the Hon. Member has said, but:

—if the Commissioner concludes that the circumstances so require, to recommend any changes in the regulatory and administrative control of the banking industry—

These terms of reference refer specifically to administrative control.

PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE—GOVERNMENT POSITION

Hon. Herb Gray (Windsor West): Mr. Speaker, I want to direct my supplementary question to the Government House Leader because the Minister of Finance should go back and read the terms of reference again.

The Government House Leader said that the Royal Commission was appointed because the Opposition was not prepared to proceed with the matter, and for further good and sufficient reasons. Is it not a fact, as widely reported in the press over the weekend, that both I, as Opposition House Leader, and the NDP House Leader, stated publicly on Friday that we were quite prepared to have this matter go to a parliamentary committee?

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Gray (Windsor West): And is it not curious that only after we confirmed our willingness to have this go to committee the Government suddenly decided to have this hidden in a Royal Commission?

Mr. Clark (Yellowhead): Wiggle and run, Herb.

Mr. Gray (Windsor West): Isn't that curious?

Hon. Ray Hnatyshyn (President of the Privy Council): Mr. Speaker, I have always considered it to be part of my negotiations with the Hon. Member that we would not negotiate outside of House Leaders' meetings. I am interested to see that at long last the Opposition is now ready to give consideration to the parliamentary committee, but the Hon. Member will be the first to admit that there were a number of items, which we had put forward right at the beginning of this whole process when I laid down the terms of reference, which would have provided for an open and thorough examination by parliamentarians but the Opposition refused to go along with it because they were interested only in cheap political points, not in getting to the bottom of a very serious matter for Canadians.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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FISHERIES

DEPARTMENTAL OFFICIALS

Mr. Ray Skelly (Comox-Powell River): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Acting Minister of Fisheries. He will know and I hope confirm for this House that orders have gone out within the Department of Fisheries that no one is to speak to the former Minister of Fisheries. No one is to speak to the political staff of the former Minister of Fisheries who are still working. No one is to return calls to the Premier of Nova Scotia.

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Skelly: The Premier of New Brunswick.

Mr. Clark (Yellowhead): They are all the same to the NDP.

Mr. Skelly: Is it the Government's intention to root out and get rid of officials in the Department who, it believes, are responsible for the present scandal which affected the Government? Or is it in order to get the heat off the Prime Minister's Office?

Hon. Erik Nielsen (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of National Defence): Mr. Speaker, to my knowledge the entire preamble of the Hon. Member's question is totally unfounded, and the inferences contained in the question itself are totally unworthy of him.