

Oral Questions

● (1435)

In the meantime Mr. Wilson is working very hard. In fact he had a meeting with cabinet this morning to establish hard and fast guidelines for dealing with quasi-judicial bodies that will respect the work of ministers and at the same time respect the rights of constituents across this country to be rightfully represented in Parliament. I do not want the electors of Hamilton East to have their hands tied just because I happen to be in the cabinet.

The Speaker: My colleagues, once again I would appeal to you to make both the questions and the answers as brief as possible.

Mrs. Jan Brown (Calgary Southeast, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Canadian Heritage.

We learned that the Minister of Canadian Heritage has written eight letters to the CRTC. Seven of these letters do recognize that he cannot interfere, yet in the eighth letter he does not qualify his interventions. The minister knew that he was not to interfere in seven cases. Why did he choose to intervene in this particular case with the quasi-judicial body for which he is responsible?

Hon. Sheila Copps (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Environment, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the premise of the hon. member's question in fact is refuted by a letter that she received from the person to whom she referred yesterday when she said there were allegations of undue influence.

In fact the secretary general of the CRTC has written back to the hon. member stating: "All communications related to a public process are treated in the same way regardless of originator. This includes a minister of the crown or other members of Parliament". The member will know that because she received the letter from Mr. Darling which clarified very specifically that no special treatment had been received.

Mrs. Jan Brown (Calgary Southeast, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, my question was directed to the Minister of Canadian Heritage. I believe we still do have a Minister of Canadian Heritage on the other side.

With respect to the communication between the CRTC secretary general and my office, yes indeed I did have a panic-stricken secretary general call me yesterday.

My question is focused on the Deputy Prime Minister in this instance. Yesterday in an interview the minister of immigration stated he would not send a letter to the Immigration and Refugee Board. He said it would be wrong for him to write to a quasi-judicial body that reports directly to him. I do not understand this. The minister of immigration appears to understand it, but the Minister of Canadian Heritage does not.

The Prime Minister is not applying the same ethic requirements to all of his cabinet. I ask this question specifically and directly for an answer. Why is he giving the Minister of Canadian Heritage such special treatment in this instance?

Hon. Sheila Copps (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Environment, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister came to this House and provided members with all the facts and information surrounding the matter. In fact he stated quite clearly that the minister in question made a mistake.

● (1440)

The minister in question made a mistake and the guidelines as they relate to quasi-judicial bodies were not clear. He had moved to rectify the mistake, first of all by the member's letter specifically to the CRTC. Second the Prime Minister moved to clarify the guidelines by asking Mr. Wilson to reintroduce a new package. In the meantime he has established interim guidelines where all future communications of all ministers to quasi-judicial bodies must go through the ethics counsellor.

I think he has done the job in four days and I feel that he has delivered on his promise of honest government. I believe he has reinforced the notion that ethics and integrity are the hallmark of his administration, they are not simply a regulation.

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[Translation]

CANADIAN SECURITY INTELLIGENCE SERVICE

Mr. François Langlois (Bellechasse, BQ): Mr. Speaker, while the Minister of Canadian Heritage continues his soul searching and is probably getting ready to confess all, let me address another issue. My question is for the Deputy Prime Minister.

CSIS is back in the hot seat. According to a book entitled *Betrayal*, which will hit the stands this week, CSIS asked one of its agents to plant a bomb aboard an Air India plane in Rome in 1986, so that Sikh terrorists would be blamed for it.

Does the government intend to check such troubling allegations and does it acknowledge that, if they are proven true, the strongest measures should be taken against such criminal activities?

[English]

Hon. Herb Gray (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Solicitor General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this matter was reviewed by the Security Intelligence Review Committee and was reported on in its public report in 1987-88. It is my recollection that the Security Intelligence Review Committee in that report found that CSIS had acted properly, contrary to the allegations.