

## Oral Questions

[English]

## NATIONAL SECURITY

RESPONSIBILITY OF COMMUNICATIONS BRANCH OF NRC—  
ACCEPTABILITY OF MINISTER'S ROLE

**Mr. Perrin Beatty (Wellington-Grey-Dufferin-Waterloo):** Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Prime Minister, and it arises from the statement of the Minister of State for Science and Technology that he is kept informed as to the activities of the communications branch of the NRC, and I quote, "to the extent that they think I could be useful". Quite apart from the question of parliamentary scrutiny of the nation's security apparatus, I ask the Prime Minister whether the minister's position that it is proper for him to leave the matter strictly in the hands of the communications branch with respect to whether he is made aware of their activities is in his opinion acceptable procedure for the overseeing of the country's security machinery?

**Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister):** Mr. Speaker, it seems to be a matter of administrative convenience. Cabinet ministers, and certainly I, myself, do not ask their officials to report to them on every possible subject which comes before them. They rely on the judgment of their immediate advisors and deputy ministers or directors, and if on some occasions they do not have confidence in or doubt the judgment of those advisors, of course, they will look beyond the advice given, but as a matter of practice I am sure no minister wants to know every detail of everything which happens under his jurisdiction.

**Mr. Beatty:** Of course, I was not asking that the Minister of State for Science and Technology be informed of every detail of their activities, but is the Prime Minister saying that it is acceptable procedure for a minister of the Crown responsible for one important part of our security apparatus to simply rely upon the judgment of the people involved in the machinery as to whether he should be kept informed of their activities, or does the Prime Minister feel that experiences in other jurisdictions with respect to this matter would justify ministers responsible for the security apparatus taking an active part in overseeing the activities of groups responsible to them?

**Mr. Trudeau:** Mr. Speaker, there is no contradiction between the two postures. I am sure every minister oversees every aspect coming under his jurisdiction, but he does not ask his officials to report on every detail of it. He relies on their judgment to bring to his attention matters which are of importance.

[Later:]

POSSIBILITY COMMUNICATIONS BRANCH OF NRC  
MONITORING LONG DISTANCE TELEPHONE CALLS

**Mr. Joe Clark (Rocky Mountain):** Mr. Speaker, my question is also for the Prime Minister who, I presume, is sporting a Pick Nick button because he could not find anyone in Alberta to wear it.

**Some hon. Members:** Oh, oh!

[Mr. Chrétien.]

**Mr. Clark:** I want to return to the security matter and refer again to the testimony of the Minister of State for Science and Technology who said that the communications branch of the NRC, and I quote, "do monitor Hertzian waves emanations." Since that phrase could include microwave communications, including long distance telephone calls, will the Prime Minister tell the House whether the agency is monitoring long distance telephone calls placed in Canada to points in Canada or outside Canada?

**Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister):** Mr. Speaker, I do not know, but I will refer the question to the Minister of Communications or the Minister of State for Science and Technology to see if either of them can give the answer in the public interest.

REASON FOR TRANSFER OF COMMUNICATIONS BRANCH FROM  
NRC TO NATIONAL DEFENCE—MINISTER TO WHOM BRANCH  
REPORTS

**Mr. Joe Clark (Rocky Mountain):** I trust that a simple answer as to whether such an activity is being conducted can be divulged to the House of Commons. My supplementary to the Prime Minister deals with whether the transfer of the communications branch of the National Research Council to the Department of National Defence was part of a general transfer of security responsibilities. If not, will the Prime Minister tell us why the communications branch of the NRC was transferred and whether it is the plan of the government to concentrate all security agencies in one ministry so that one minister can exercise the kind of supervision of which my hon. colleague spoke earlier and which, according to the Prime Minister's colleague who is absent today, is necessary in the case of the communications branch.

**Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister):** My understanding of the reason for the transfer is that the Department of National Defence is the main user of the kind of intelligence which might be gathered by this unit. The Department of National Defence is, of course, interested in intelligence relating to military operations of foreign powers, and that is why it is the main user. As to the other suggestion, the answer is no. The over-all supervision for matters of security and intelligence comes under the cabinet and, more particularly, under the cabinet committee on security and intelligence.

**Mr. Clark (Rocky Mountain):** Will the Prime Minister advise the House whether the communications branch, now of the Department of National Defence, will report to the Minister of National Defence, or will it report to someone else? If it is someone else, who is that other person, and where is that person located in the government?

**Mr. Trudeau:** Mr. Speaker, this is a matter of internal function of the government apparatus. If answers can be given along these lines, they will be given by one minister designated by me. If the answers cannot be given, they will not be given by any minister.