

[English]

ROYAL CANADIAN MOUNTED POLICE

SEIZURE OF TELEPHONE RECORDS—INVESTIGATION BY McDONALD COMMISSION

Hon. Ray Hnatyshyn (Saskatoon West): Madam Speaker, I would like to direct a question to the Solicitor General. The CBC has revealed that in the districts of Halifax, Dartmouth and Sydney over the course of the past two to three years approximately 99 warrants were issued with respect to the seizure of telephone records, including the records of the CBC. In the information forming the basis for those warrants, at least 45 out of the 99 did not contain any basis upon which the warrants should be issued.

Has the Solicitor General examined that matter through the RCM Police? Has he given directions with respect to the policies of the RCM Police which will ensure that they will be more forthcoming as to the basis upon which they apply for these search warrants? Is the McDonald commission being seized of this particular situation, so that a full investigation can be made of the practice of the RCMP in this regard?

Hon. Bob Kaplan (Solicitor General): Madam Speaker, I have the information which appeared on the CBC television program, but I do not yet have a full report from the RCMP about it. I have examined the operational policy manual which applies to the information required for obtaining a warrant. I am satisfied with the operational policy which is in place, but I am not yet certain whether the policy was complied with in these cases.

The provincial attorneys general have jurisdiction to examine such matters that take place in their own province. Of course, we are prepared to co-operate fully with them. As to the McDonald commission, that independent commission will make its own decision, I am sure, whether to review these matters.

Mr. Hnatyshyn: I was going to direct my supplementary question to the Minister of Justice, but he is not in his place at the present time. Therefore, I will direct it to the Solicitor General.

After this investigation, will he report to the House, not only whether a practice has or has not been established to put forward the basis upon which these applications are made on the information of a sworn statement, but if he finds that is not the case will he institute a policy by which that is required in the case of RCMP activities? Also, will he assure us that this practice is not widespread, that it does not apply also to Charge or Visa investigations, or involve the general public who are very concerned with respect to their privacy?

● (1450)

Finally, is the Solicitor General in fact considering bringing forward limitations on writs of assistance, which are open-ended writs available now to law enforcement agencies in this country, the undertaking of the previous government being to

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bring forward legislation to do something to regulate that particular search warrant?

Mr. Kaplan: Madam Speaker, so far as writs of assistance are concerned, there is a moratorium in effect on their issuance. No position paper has yet been taken to cabinet on that question, so it would be premature to indicate what steps the government will be taking except that the moratorium will be continued until some further decision is taken.

On the question of the policy which applies to the issuance of warrants, as I indicated, I spent time this morning reviewing that operational policy and I am satisfied with it. The question I am not certain about yet is whether the policy was complied with in these particular cases. I am looking into that, and I will be prepared to answer questions about it as soon as I am informed about it.

Mr. Hnatyshyn: Report back.

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ENERGY

OIL REFINERY TAX—GOVERNMENT INTENTIONS

Mr. Ian Waddell (Vancouver-Kingsway): Madam Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources. Both before and during the last election campaign he and his party campaigned against the infamous 18 cents excise tax increase proposal of the Clark government. He said at the time that it was regressive and that it would have a bad effect on the economy.

I understand now that the minister has proposed to Alberta, in negotiations with that province, that there be an oil refinery tax which, I am sure the minister must know, would be just as regressive, or even worse for the consumer. Could the minister confirm that he has proposed such a tax? Could he confirm that it is just as regressive as the previous tax, and even more so? If that is so, why has he done this?

[Translation]

Hon. Marc Lalonde (Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources): Madam Speaker, as I have already indicated, the government has various alternatives in mind regarding a possible oil price increase.

In his question, the hon. member indicates that this is one of the alternatives. After we hopefully reach an agreement with the producing provinces, my hon. colleague can come to any conclusion he pleases him about the agreement.

[English]

Mr. Waddell: Madam Speaker, perhaps the minister has forgotten he promised the consumers of Canada that they would have lower oil prices than those which the Conservatives proposed. It sounds like another broken promise.

Let me ask the minister about one of his other promises. Can the minister tell the House why, during the election campaign, he and his party promised that they would maintain