

Oral Questions

Hon. Jean Chrétien (Minister of Justice and Minister of State for Social Development): Madam Speaker, we have authorized a change of the order to permit access to some documents by people who are the defendants in these cases. With regard to the statement by the hon. member to the effect that a gag order is no longer needed, I think that it is still needed—

An hon. Member: Why?

Mr. Chrétien:—but I am glad he implicitly recognized that we were well advised to have the gag order.

REASONS FOR NON-REMOVAL OF ORDER

Hon. Ray Hnatyshyn (Saskatoon West): Madam Speaker, the only excuse the government has given so far for keeping the gag order in place is so that it can protect its own cronies, as far as protecting Senator Jack Austin and others is concerned.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hnatyshyn: There are many civil actions which could well be brought with respect to an illegal domestic cartel. It is alleged, for example, that the people of Ontario have paid and lost hundreds of millions of dollars with respect to artificial uranium pricing. In order to allow provincial governments and agencies and utilities to investigate their civil opportunities for recovery, I would again ask the minister why he does not allow the gag order to be removed in order for justice to take its course?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Jean Chrétien (Minister of Justice and Minister of State for Social Development): Madam Speaker, I wish to remind the hon. member that there was an investigation into this matter, as recommended by Mr. Bertrand, which took quite a few months. When we received Mr. Bertrand's report, I personally approved the report's recommendations after discussing them with the lawyer who had served on the case for Mr. Bertrand, and who has now approached the courts. I think we are being entirely open about this, and we have agreed with all the recommendations we received on this matter. The case is now before the courts, and we have allowed the gag order to be lifted to a certain extent, so that lawyers for the defence can prepare their case. I believe that everything is quite in order. As for the hon. member's allegations that a gag order is no longer necessary because litigation has been completed in the United States, I do not believe that is quite the case, but I will look into this, and we may change our approach if necessary.

• (1440)

[*English*]

CANADA POST

SHIPMENT OF GROCERIES TO NORTHERN COMMUNITIES

Mr. Keith Penner (Cochrane-Superior): Madam Speaker, I have a question for the Solicitor General. As the minister may know, prior to the establishment of the Canada Post Corporation the postmaster general permitted groceries to be shipped via parcel post into isolated Indian communities located in the northern regions of Ontario, Quebec and Manitoba. This procedure enabled food costs to be reduced by as much as \$50 per week for a family of six. It has come to my attention that the Canada Post Corporation has requested the RCMP to examine this practice to discern whether it, or some aspect of it, may constitute a criminal offence.

I would like the Solicitor General to tell this House how it can possibly be a crime to help people who are living at or below the subsistence level to receive the nutrition they need by way of parcel post service.

Hon. Bob Kaplan (Solicitor General): Madam Speaker, Canada Post and the new corporation have been engaged in the practice of carrying perishable foods to persons in northern communities. There is absolutely nothing improper or illegal about that. It is a fine service Canada Post is providing, and I want to assure the House that the allegations which have been made and are under investigation by the RCMP—and to which I do not want to give more currency by repeating them—having nothing to do with regular customers of that service who are engaging in a perfectly lawful practice and hopefully will continue to be served by Canada Post in that way for many years.

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INDIAN AFFAIRS

PRIMACY OF ABORIGINAL RIGHTS

Mr. Jim Manly (Cowichan-Malahat-The Islands): Madam Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development. Yesterday the minister released a native claims policy which says that "persons of non-native origin who have acquired for various purposes rights in the land area claimed are equally deserving of consideration". Does this mean, for example, that a company with oil drilling rights in the Northwest Territories is as deserving of consideration as the aboriginal people who have a claim in that area and, if this is so, will the minister change his policy to recognize the primacy of aboriginal rights rather than seeing them in competition with the exploitive rights of multinational corporations?

Hon. John C. Munro (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development): Madam Speaker, I think the hon. member should read that in the context of discussions which