

Supply

We in the House want Canadians to know that we will not hesitate to use the authority that Canadian citizens have given us if we need to use them. I can point respectfully to the mace that sits on the table which is, as a symbol, the repository of every one of the powers and authorities that Canadians have given all of us in the House.

What are the allegations that the Official Opposition would like to see investigated? There are two categories. First is the allegation that an alleged informant of CSIS had involved himself in some fashion in intelligence gathering or other with a CBC journalist, in another instance with some activities of the Reform Party of Canada, in another instance in an attempt to obtain an address list of members of the Canadian Jewish Congress and in another instance, potentially some intelligence gathering in relation to the Canadian Union of Postal Workers.

Those are four categorized items for which allegations are being investigated as we speak by the Security Intelligence Review Committee which has three staff permanently working on them.

The second issue has to do with security of classified documents. Essentially put the question is: How did a box of allegedly classified documents make its way out of a secure environment and into the basement of a residence somewhere in Ottawa and on to the pages of a major newspaper? That is a very reasonable question. That particular question is not one that the Security Intelligence Review Committee would ordinarily be able to look at, but it is one that the parliamentary subcommittee can and will look at.

There are other related questions, hypothetical allegations, what ifs. Those questions have been asked publicly and the subcommittee will do its job as will SIRC. The subcommittee will consult with SIRC as it goes about its job and vice versa. My colleagues on the subcommittee will inquire into all of these questions over the next few weeks.

Finally, in my view a royal commission at this point is absolutely unnecessary, ridiculously expensive and procedurally redundant in the extreme. I want to assure members in the House and Canadians that colleagues who are on the subcommittee will deal with the issues in a responsible way, in a rational way, in a manner that does not duplicate and waste resources and in a way that we hope will continue the faith of Canadians in the way Parliament works and in the way CSIS and SIRC operate.

• (1520)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Patrick Gagnon (Parliamentary Secretary to Solicitor General): Mr. Speaker, we have been told that the cost of a royal commission of inquiry would be in the order of \$9 to \$25 million. We are a government striving to limit costs and I

believe that the people have demonstrated, again and again, that they want better control of spending.

Since a royal commission of inquiry like the one proposed by the opposition would cost between \$9 and \$25 million, I am curious to find out the real cost of the sub-committee chaired by my colleague, and I would like to know whether this sub-committee can exercise substantially the same authority as a royal commission?

[*English*]

Mr. Lee: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for the question.

On the question of cost, as Canadians know and members know, every member of Parliament is paid a salary. Each committee and subcommittee will have a clerk, a researcher and such other staff as the committee may need but within a budget that comes from the House of Commons, all of which is relatively closely controlled these days.

The cost of the members of Parliament, the cost of the offices, the cost of the office space—we are not going to go out and lease a floor of an office building somewhere in Ottawa. We already have committee rooms that will be put to use—are being absorbed almost exclusively at this point in the existing budgets of the House of Commons.

In terms of the powers and the mandate of the subcommittee, or any committee of the House for that matter, those mandates are primarily set out in the standing orders of the House, but they are very general. The mandate of the subcommittee in this instance is more than adequate to cover the subject area that we are dealing with.

As I stated earlier, the power to compel attendance, the power to require disclosure are virtually absolute. I will not say they are absolute because there are very few absolutes left any more in law and politics. They are virtually and precisely as great or as small as the members of the House will them to be in their work, in committee or on the floor of the House.

There is plenty of opportunity, mandate, power and resources to do the job.

[*Translation*]

Mr. François Langlois (Bellechasse): Mr. Speaker, through you, I would like to tell the hon. member for Scarborough—Rouge River that I share his views regarding the powers of the sub-committee he is chairing and the authority of Parliament to review all decisions made by government agencies.

The problem is neither with the Sub-committee on National Security nor with the hon. member for Scarborough—Rouge River, the problem is with the people who make up the review committee, SIRC, who, when they appeared before the sub-committee on September 13, hid behind a particular interpretation of section 54 of the act when refusing to answer the questions of members duly elected to this House.