

Oral Questions

[English]

LABOUR CONDITIONS

ALLEGATIONS AGAINST SEAFARERS' INTERNATIONAL UNION—MATTERS BEING INVESTIGATED BY RCMP AND ACTION TO BE TAKEN FOLLOWING REPORT

Mr. Joe Clark (Rocky Mountain): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the Solicitor General. Would the Solicitor General advise the House whether the investigation by the RCMP is an investigation into strict matters of illegality or whether there is also consideration being given in their inquiry to questions of propriety or conduct of ministers.

Hon. Warren Allmand (Solicitor General): Well, Mr. Speaker, their investigation is into the impropriety of ministers as it would relate to charges of a criminal nature relating to corruption, bribery or anything of that nature. They would not be investigating something that would not be illegal. In their investigation I presume there will be charges, counter-charges and statements by different witnesses, and then they will have to decide whether there is enough evidence to lay charges under the Criminal Code or any other statute.

Mr. Clark (Rocky Mountain): I have a supplementary, Mr. Speaker. Just so that we might understand this completely, then it is the situation that any judgment as to a question of propriety by a minister is at this stage, according to the minister's testimony, to be left exclusively to the determination of the RCMP. Is that the understanding?

Mr. Allmand: Mr. Speaker, the RCMP may check their evidence with the Crown prosecutor or other prosecutor who would lay charges in the case, although they could also lay charges directly if it were very clear that charges should be laid, but this judgment would be with them and the prosecutors and not with me.

Mr. Clark (Rocky Mountain): They will deal simply with matters which might lead to criminal charges and it is only on a question which might lead to criminal charges that they would make the recommendation. This is my question. Is it only on matters relating to criminal charges that they would make a recommendation to the minister or that they would cause action to be taken in the courts? If that is so, what provision is there in the extremely limited investigation under way now for evidence to be brought forward that would allow this parliament and the country to come to conclusions as to whether or not there had been acts of impropriety on the part of ministers which did not involve a strict violation of the law?

● (1130)

Mr. Allmand: Mr. Speaker, it is true that the police are investigating matters that would give rise to charges before the courts. If no charges are made before the courts, then it will be up to parliament to proceed in another way.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton): Show us the testimony.

[Mr. Drury.]

ALLEGATIONS AGAINST SEAFARERS' INTERNATIONAL UNION—REQUEST BY PROVINCIAL AUTHORITIES FOR FEDERAL INQUIRY—GOVERNMENT POSITION

Mr. G. W. Baldwin (Peace River): My question is for the Acting Prime Minister. Given the fact that the government are appearing to fob this off on the provincial authorities and forces of law, and having in mind that it now appears on record, at least the public statements I have heard made over the radio, that the provincial attorney general and other provincial authorities suggest that there should be a federal inquiry, will the government not accept that as being an adequate reason for holding this judicial inquiry?

Hon. Mitchell Sharp (Acting Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, there seems to be some confusion about the two types of inquiries and I think it is important that they should be distinguished. The hon. member for Rocky Mountain has been talking about possible improprieties of officials or ministers. I gather that the House leader of the Progressive Conservative party is talking about an inquiry into the allegations of violence on the waterfront. In that particular case—because that is what I understand to be his question—we are awaiting information from the Ontario government about the facts—what is the evidence of violence—and if there is sufficient evidence I think there would be a case for an inquiry. But we are awaiting the facts. We do not have them and we have seen nothing as yet that would justify such a serious investigation as is proposed either under the Inquiries Act or under other legislation.

Mr. Baldwin: On the basis of that statement, given the fact that the provincial law enforcement officers will have knowledge of these allegations, will the government accept the request of the provincial authorities, in the face of the knowledge they have, as being an adequate reason for instituting a public inquiry?

Mr. Sharp: My colleague, the Minister of Justice, has put just such inquiries to the Ontario government. As yet they have not provided the evidence.

ALLEGATIONS AGAINST THE SEAFARERS' INTERNATIONAL UNION—LACK OF INDEPENDENCE OF SOLICITOR GENERAL AS JUSTIFICATION FOR INDEPENDENT INQUIRY

Mr. Bill Jarvis (Perth-Wilmot): My supplementary is for the Acting Prime Minister. Putting aside for the moment the evidence which he has or does not have which may prompt an independent inquiry, may I suggest that in view of the fact that the Solicitor General yesterday or the day before has characterized a particular member of the Ontario legislature as one who has no respect for the truth, a liar or muckraker, whatever his words were, and in view of the fact that the RCMP expressly by statute are responsible for this inquiry, is it not the government's position that the lack of independence of the Solicitor General, who is directly responsible for the RCMP, is sufficient in itself to warrant an inquiry that is independent of the Solicitor General?

Hon. Warren Allmand (Solicitor General): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a question of privilege. The hon. member just