

Oral Questions

occasions that the policy was determined by the government. It was enunciated in various ways. It had been enunciated in this House by the former solicitor general, the hon. member for Argenteuil-Deux-Montagnes. He gave a very lengthy statement of policy when the whole subject matter became available to the government. Various committees, including the committee on security and intelligence, were set up by myself precisely to give policy guidance to the RCMP.

In policy matters it is, of course, obvious that the government should give the direction and the police should obey. I have said on other occasions that on the day to day operations, the detail of operative so-and-so at the end of the line, and the way he was collecting information or conducting an investigation, was not a matter of discussion in the committee which I chaired. I suppose, except in exceptional circumstances, when the police ask for guidance it probably would not be the business of the respective minister to every day find out all the day to day actions of the police in the ten provinces across the country.

Mr. Nielsen: A final supplementary, Mr. Speaker. In view of the exhibits that were introduced in evidence yesterday, and the fact that they dealt with the policy of indemnifying RCMP officers as described by the hon. member for Perth-Wilmot, how then can the government now deny that they were aware of that kind of activity and policy? How can they deny it at this stage?

Mr. Trudeau: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member says, in view of the exhibits deposited yesterday. I said three times today—and I say it a fourth time—I have not seen those exhibits; I do not know what is in them.

If there is a general accusation, as I understand from one of the questions, that the government had decided to indemnify police who broke the law, the answer has been given by the present Solicitor General. There is no such policy. I know of no such policy. If there is such a policy, it will be up to the royal commission to find out where this policy originated, whether from the minister or the police, and what was its justification. However, that is the job of the commission, not of the hon. member nor myself.

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POST OFFICE**RETURN TO WORK OF CUPW MEMBERS—JOB SECURITY**

Mr. Lincoln M. Alexander (Hamilton West): Mr. Speaker, I wish to direct a question to the Postmaster General. We all know that the Postmaster General has, by notice under date of October 24 from the desk of Postmaster General, advised the membership of CUPW that if they do not return to work by 12.01 a.m. tomorrow, they will be out of a job. Section 27 of this act reads as follows:

An employee . . . may by an appropriate instrument in writing to the commission be declared by the deputy head to have abandoned the position he occupied and thereupon the employee ceases to be an employee.

● (1452)

Has the Postmaster General made up his mind as to whether he will instruct the deputy minister to follow the strict provisions of section 27? Has he made up his mind about whether the deputy minister should write to the Public Service Commission indicating that certain employees have abandoned their jobs and are no longer employees?

Hon. J. Gilles Lamontagne (Postmaster General): Mr. Speaker, section 27 of the act is very clear. I think we will have to act on that legislation the way it is written. However, I do not think it has ever been the intention of this government to penalize good, honest and law-abiding workers. Obviously, every case will be considered. All evidence regarding each worker will be considered and each case will be judged on its merits. The 14 district directors will review the facts presented to them, because some workers might have reasons for not coming back to work. I will give examples of those reasons in a few moments. Those 14 district directors will then report to the deputy minister, who will notify the Public Service Commission and then a decision will be taken.

I think it was very wise to allow our workers to be on notice that this section is in existence. Most of our workers did not know it was, so I think it was wise to make them aware of the position into which their leaders were putting them and the risk they were taking by listening to the counsel of their leaders not to abide by the law and to refuse to go back to work. I can inform the House that at one o'clock this afternoon, 34 per cent of CUPW membership was back to work and about 89 per cent of the membership of the LCUC.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Alexander: Mr. Speaker, I am sure the Canadian people will be interested in the answer just given, but if my memory serves me correctly I do not think the Postmaster General actually answered my question. I asked the Postmaster General if he has made up his mind to instruct the deputy minister to follow the provisions of section 27 of the act. Has the minister instructed the deputy minister to follow those provisions or is this matter being held in abeyance?

Mr. Trudeau: What would you like, Linc?

Mr. Alexander: I would just like an answer, and I thank the Prime Minister for helping me. Would the minister kindly answer that question?

Mr. Trudeau: Whose side are you on?

Mr. Alexander: I am not on your side.

Mr. Lamontagne: Mr. Speaker, I think the answer is very simple: the section is there and it will be applied wisely and in fairness to the workers. It will be applied, but as I said before—and I do not want to repeat everything—I have many communications. I spoke to Vancouver this morning, and I have heard from many parts of the country about good, honest and law-abiding workers who want to go to work but because