

Oral Questions

Mr. Clark (Yellowhead): We know that there was a covert operation mounted by officials of the Prime Minister's Office. I ask the Acting Prime Minister who authorized it?

Hon. Allan J. MacEachen (Deputy Prime Minister and Secretary of State for External Affairs): Mr. Speaker, if one were to take at face value the description given by the Right Hon. Member for Yellowhead, or indeed presumably the newspaper article upon which his descriptions have been based, then there might be cause for concern because the newspaper story alleges a covert intelligence operation. That is quite untrue, and quite false. There was no such covert intelligence operation conducted by the Prime Minister's Office into the conduct of the Leader of the Opposition and into his background before he entered public life. There was no such covert operation, and I deny it completely.

I would ask the Right Hon. Member for Yellowhead to take a rather more responsible attitude to a very important matter.

Mr. Clark (Yellowhead): The Acting Prime Minister's denial, and his disinterest in the fundamental principles of decency and morality and the practice of the House of Commons are denied by the words of the officials in the Prime Minister's Office.

RESPONSIBILITY FOR AUTHORIZING INVESTIGATION

Right Hon. Joe Clark (Yellowhead): Mr. Speaker, I notice that the Acting Prime Minister has admitted that there was an operation. I notice that he has declined to answer my question as to who authorized it. I repeat that question. Who authorized that operation which we believe broke the law, and which we know broke the traditions of this Parliament? To whom did Mr. Crenna report when he came back from his vain witch hunt in Washington?

● (1420)

Hon. Allan J. MacEachen (Deputy Prime Minister and Secretary of State for External Affairs): Mr. Speaker, let us take the case of Mr. Crenna and explain exactly what happened.

Mr. Crenna is a full-time employee of the Prime Minister's Office. He was in Washington on a variety of questions as a member of that office. They were important public questions which he was examining in Washington, in the course of which he went to the Securities and Exchange Commission to seek the annual report of the Iron Ore Company, and to seek some other information that is part of the public record. He went into a public office, signed a paper, secured authority to receive those documents which are available to any citizen in the United States and in Canada. It took a very short time, and this is the basis upon which the former Leader of the Opposition uses the words "a witch hunt", and the basis upon which the writer in *The Globe and Mail* says that two employees, two people from the Prime Minister's Office, were engaged in covert intelligence gathering.

What Mr. Crenna did in Washington is something that was done publicly, that was done openly, and that is on the public record. There is nothing covert about it. It can be done by any citizen, by paying the required fee to the public authority.

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

REASON FOR OBTAINING INFORMATION FROM U.S. SECURITIES AND EXCHANGE COMMISSION

Right Hon. Joe Clark (Yellowhead): Mr. Speaker, again the Acting Prime Minister refuses to answer the question. He has admitted the operation.

Let me ask him why Mr. Crenna was down there getting information from the Securities and Exchange Commission? Who authorized his venture? To whom did he report when he came back? Will the Acting Prime Minister tell us whether the Prime Minister of Canada knew about this venture directly, or whether he knew about the operation only indirectly through his principal secretary who was part of the group that laid the plan?

Hon. Allan J. MacEachen (Deputy Prime Minister and Secretary of State for External Affairs): Mr. Speaker, I think we have to bear in mind that what Mr. Crenna sought was public information on the operation of a wholly owned multinational corporation. It is a matter of public record that when the Leader of the Opposition sought the leadership of his Party, he built a very important part of his appeal to the Canadian public on his superior management abilities in the Iron Ore Company of Canada and how he handled labour adjustment problems. It seemed to me to be—

Mr. Clark (Yellowhead): To you?

Mr. MacEachen: —a very important part of the research activities of any professional organization to find out all about this masterful operation, in the words of the now Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Crenna was examining an issue that had been brought into the public domain by the Leader of the Opposition as he sought the leadership of the Conservative Party, and which he incorporated into his party manifesto. What is wrong with that? I do not see anything wrong with it—

Mr. Andre: That is what Alfred Apps has been saying.

Mr. MacEachen: —to find out about the public operations of a multinational corporation with operations in Canada.

The former Leader of the Opposition asks who authorized this. The project was under the direction of the principal secretary who employs all the staff. I do not know whether the Prime Minister knew about it or not. I certainly did not know anything about it. I find it quite a normal operation to keep informed about what is going on.