

Even on the criminal aspects, we had only the sketchiest of information, and a special express letter promised December 9 and relayed by telephone from Mr. Kerr's office on December 11 added very little more to enlighten us. It was not until early in January that we obtained access to files of the Ontario police, when an official of the Department of Justice was dispatched to Toronto to examine them.

When certain affidavits alleging hiring hall irregularities were turned over to me on December 12, my deputy minister, at my request, directed officials of my department to undertake their own separate investigation, with specific reference to abuses of the hiring hall system. A Department of Labour officer was assigned December 23 and his investigation commenced on January 2, 1975.

The outcome of the justice department investigation, as the Minister of Justice disclosed on April 29, was that no further inquiry by his department was necessary in view of the evidence obtained by his officials. If there was to be a federal inquiry, it would be initiated by the labour department under the terms of the Canada Labour Code, and it would relate to industrial relations matters alone.

I have given this chronology of events to make it clear that at no time was there any attempt by this government to cover up, or stall, or whitewash in respect of alleged SIU wrongdoing. We could not, constitutionally or morally, have acted any differently or any more promptly on this matter, given the lack of sufficient evidence and information on which an earlier federal inquiry into SIU activities was demanded.

● (1510)

The terms of reference for this investigation are as follows:

The investigation group will examine allegations and evidence concerning practices followed by officers or persons associated with the Seafarers' International Union and will carry out such investigatory activity as it deems necessary in order to:

(a) determine whether there exist now or have occurred violations of part V of the Canada Labour Code and what they are, so that appropriate legal action may be taken, and

(b) provide detailed information upon which can be based a realistic assessment of the adequacy of existing provisions of part V of the code for protecting both individual rights and the public interest.

The investigation will be carried out under the authority of the Minister of Labour pursuant to section 196 of part V of the Canada Labour Code. It will require, in the first instance, the full co-operation of police forces that have already investigated aspects of allegations concerning the SIU in making available information already in their possession. I might add that the RCMP also have indicated they are prepared to co-operate with officials of my department in carrying out the terms of reference and the investigation.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Too little, too late.

SIU

Mr. Lincoln M. Alexander (Hamilton West): Mr. Speaker, I just want to say that I received a copy of this excuse for a statement at approximately 17 minutes to three. I would not accept an apology from the minister even if he were to give one. I think this type of waiting until the last minute to give a copy to opposition spokesmen who are to reply is a matter which we on this side have continually reminded the government about. We do not like it.

As I look at the minister's statement, it appears to be one of the cheapest shots I have ever heard in all my short life. It is extremely partisan. He went into what he described as the strange action of the government of Ontario. That is the phrase which really brought me to my feet, "the strange action of the Ontario government". In the midst of an election year, the minister chronologically outlines an event, blaming everyone except himself for his ineptitude. I am very shocked at the way in which the minister conducted himself. All those backbenchers can laugh. They laugh at anything whether it is serious or not. This is a serious matter.

What this statement does is indicate that the minister did not have any knowledge concerning what to do until April 29. It also passes the buck to the province of Ontario. Finally, it makes up an excuse for the minister's own inaction. Mr. Speaker, this entire scenario, involving even the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) who did not want us to become involved because it would appear as if we were acting in a totalitarian way, involving the Minister of Justice (Mr. Lang) who procrastinated to some degree, and involving the Minister of Labour (Mr. Munro), has been nothing but an unwarranted delay and a callous disregard for the rights of individuals in respect of alleged union mismanagement. Under no circumstances, particularly in this country in 1975, should Canadians live in fear. Does the minister care? Will the hon. member opposite keep still, because he might learn something? Section 196 states:

The minister, upon application or of his own initiative may do such things as to him seem likely to maintain or secure industrial peace and to promote conditions favourable to the settlement of industrial disputes or differences.

Here we have a minister who goes around the country talking about consensus in terms of industrial peace, while a matter has been sitting on his lap for almost a year. He turned a deaf ear to the pleas from the province of Ontario, a deaf ear to the opposition and to the people of Canada. It seems to me that the Minister of Labour ignored the legitimate request made by the province calling for a judicial inquiry and conveniently forgot that the federal government had established a federal commission of inquiry on Great Lakes shipping in 1962. He ignored the fact that Mr. Justice T. J. Norris recommended that the SIU be placed under federal trusteeship and that the federal government, after great political pressure, attempted to extradite Banks from the United States. The following is the advice given by Mr. Justice Norris:

All police forces, federal, provincial and municipal, should extend their efforts to the utmost in co-operation with each other—avoiding jurisdictional jealousies—to the end that there shall be certainty in the enforcement of the law and that respect for the law will be maintained.

This was completely ignored by the minister. It is therefore easy to conclude that the government during this