

Oral Questions

Over a year ago the minister indicated his view was that the RCMP should have the power to open first class mail in Canada. At that time the minister promised to release a study which would justify this demand on his part. Will the minister now release the study, which was done apparently some time ago, having promised to do so after the report of the McDonald commission? Will the minister indicate whether it is his view that the RCMP should have the power to open first-class mail in Canada and, if so, why?

Hon. Bob Kaplan (Solicitor General): Madam Speaker, let me begin by reminding the House that the opening of first-class mail is illegal. It is not being done currently by the RCMP or by any other police authority in Canada.

In so far as a change of policy is concerned, I favour that kind of change. I will be bringing forward recommendations in that area after they have been considered by cabinet. They will be considered in due course with a whole package of other changes relating to the establishment of a civilian security intelligence service.

For the time being, I have no other proposal or plan to put forward on the subject of letter opening. I can continue to assure hon. members that first-class mail is not being opened.

DESTRUCTION OF UNNECESSARY FILES

Mr. Svend J. Robinson (Burnaby): Madam Speaker, with homes being invaded by the RCMP, and with mail being opened, it seems that 1984 is much closer than some of us had thought.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Robinson (Burnaby): My supplementary question is also for the Solicitor General and it relates to another invasion of privacy. The McDonald commission stated that 1.3 million files are held on over 800,000 Canadians. The Solicitor General has agreed that some of these should be destroyed. Will the Solicitor General tell the House now how many of these files have been destroyed, and what procedures are in place to destroy all of those files quickly which the McDonald commission indicated should never have been opened in the first place?

Hon. Bob Kaplan (Solicitor General): Madam Speaker, indeed, I have made a commitment to speed the destruction of all files which should not have been opened in the first place. It is a complicated problem. Not the least complication is the necessity of doing it in a way which will satisfy Canadians that the files have been destroyed and that the information is effectively removed from the possession of the RCMP. I am working on that problem almost on a daily basis. I do not have it solved yet. However, I hope to be able to bring forward my thoughts shortly on how this can be accomplished in a way that will be effective and satisfy the Canadian people that it is effective.

NATIONAL REVENUE

MINISTER'S VIEWS ON OPENING OF MAIL

Hon. Walter Baker (Nepean-Carleton): Madam Speaker, the seatmate of the Minister of National Revenue has expressed his view that he is in favour of mail opening. I have a question for the Minister of National Revenue. As he knows, there is a report extant in his department that first-class trans-border mail ought to be opened by customs officials in order to intercept the illegal entry into Canada of drugs and other contraband. Since the Solicitor General has expressed his opinion with respect to mail opening, could we have the opinion of the Minister of National Revenue with respect to the phenomena that I have just represented to him in this question?

Hon. William Rompkey (Minister of National Revenue): Madam Speaker, first-class mail is not being opened now by customs officers.

Miss MacDonald: What do you mean by "now?"

Mr. Rompkey: There is no intent to change that practice. It is true that illegal drugs and other materials can come in by first-class mail, and it is our responsibility to intercept those materials where they are prohibited. I think we have to do that under the proper guidance of law and with the proper legal authority. That is the practice under which we operate, and under which we will continue to operate.

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COMMUNICATIONS

COMMUNITY RECEPTION OF TELEVISION BROADCASTS TRANSMITTED VIA SATELLITES

Mr. F. Oberle (Prince George-Peace River): Madam Speaker, I have a question for the Minister of Communications. He has recently announced, as reported in the press, that government policy with respect to the reception of satellite signals through earth receiving stations is that, if done by individuals, it would be legal, and that it would still be necessary to obtain a licence if the signal is rebroadcast either by cable or transmitter by associations and communities. As the minister knows, I welcome that change in policy. I know it was always his view that that should happen. However, has this policy been transmitted to the CRTC, and has the CRTC been instructed to receive applications from communities and associations which operate these earth-receiving stations? In addition, can the minister tell me the reaction of the CRTC?

Hon. Francis Fox (Minister of Communications): Madam Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his question in this regard. He has demonstrated his concern for this issue for some months now. I have not yet announced the policy in question. Our intention of deregulating as far as ownership of TVROs for individual purpose is concerned was gazetted some time last fall. As a result of that notice we received some 12 or 13 representations from various groups across the country. I