

*Privilege—Answers of Solicitor General*

The Solicitor General answered simply, "No, Mr. Speaker". The answer he gave today sounded like a "maybe" or perhaps even a "yes". I am not sure. Perhaps the Solicitor General would like to clarify one of his answers.

Provided we do not refer to information as being evidence before the Royal Commission, can we now expect to have answers to questions we ask about matters which concern ministerial responsibility? Is that what the minister is telling the House today? If that is the case, I will be sure not to use the word "evidence" in any of the questions I ask the Solicitor General. Hon. members can see the ridiculous position the government has been put into by the Solicitor General. There is a genuine question of privilege here. It goes to the root of the way we conduct our affairs in this country, and I would like to support both of the motions because I think they are excellent.

**Mr. Allan Lawrence (Northumberland-Durham):** Mr. Speaker, like other hon. members, I certainly want to look at the minister's very carefully worded statement. I am sure the Solicitor General (Mr. Blais) has been working hard on the statement—or perhaps others have been working on it over the week end on his behalf—which he gave a short time ago. It may well be that the minister's words indicate a withdrawal and a recantation, which would make the retreat from Moscow look like an air-conditioned bus ride. I am not sure, but we must take a look at it.

However, when the minister stands in this House today and says it is his desire that we take a very narrow interpretation of what he said on Friday, I think we should look again at just exactly what he did say on Friday outside the House. Any hon. member, presuming he is literate, can look in *Hansard* at what was said in the House. However, just after the exchange in this House on Friday the brand new, heavy-handed, ham-acting Solicitor General went down to the television room below us and there in his few statements to the media the minister gave an impression which was completely contrary to the impression he gave in the House today.

I want to quote from the transcript of what was said in front of the television cameras and the radio microphones in this building on Friday afternoon. The Solicitor General said the following:

I am responsible in the House of Commons to inform the House of the conduct of previous solicitors general, but when the alleged conduct, or questions relating to their administration, is before a royal commission or commission of inquiry, surely I am not going to surpercede that commission of inquiry which was appointed by the government at the request of the opposition in the House by bringing forward information in the House that ought to be submitted to the McDonald inquiry.

I do not know how the minister could be more definite than that. A little later the following question was asked:

Anything done wrong in the last seven years is something the McDonald commission, in my definition, will be looking at.

The Solicitor General gave the following answer:

That is exactly what they are looking at.

The next question was, and I quote:

Then you cannot answer any questions about it?

[Mr. Leggatt.]

The Solicitor General replied:

Well, I cannot answer questions relating to matters that come before the commission, or that the commission is presently dealing with. Yes, that is so.

The next question was the following:

Therefore, no questions in the House of Commons will be entertained that deal with RCMP wrongdoings in the past?

The minister answered:

If the matter has been referred to the commission, no.

The minister later said:

Once the commission has made a report, the opposition will be free to debate fully the terms of that report or whatever matter the House is seized of.

This is too important a matter of principle to be sloughed off by a man having that kind of dangerous concept of the responsibility and accountability of a minister of the Crown to this House.

**Some hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Lawrence:** In my submission this important matter should be sent promptly to a standing committee, it is to be hoped the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, so that the matter can be fully determined. It is too important a matter to be sloughed off by the Solicitor General in the way he has attempted to do this afternoon.

**Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister):** Mr. Speaker, both motions which are before the House have the same objective—to find out the government's position on the question of ministerial responsibility and, in particular, to establish my position on the doctrine of ministerial responsibility. I regret that the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Clark) did not ask me that question at the beginning of the question period. I would have given a very simple answer. The hon. gentleman's question could have been followed by supplementary questions, but we could hopefully have dispensed with the last hour or more of argument by the opposition to the effect that ministerial responsibility should be defined in a certain way.

This government agrees with the opposition. As far as we are concerned, there is no debate. Of course the government has to answer for acts committed under its administration. The government as a whole is responsible for things which happen or things which do not happen during its terms of office. A change of cabinet ministers from time to time does not allow the government to escape the duty and obligation of answering for its administration. This is the government's policy; this is the government's belief; this is the government's practice, and this is what the opposition has been arguing—with which we agree. There is no argument, Mr. Speaker. The Solicitor General (Mr. Blais) has to answer not only for his administration in the period during which he will be Solicitor General but he will answer for acts committed or not committed during the period in which this government has held office. This is very clearly our position. That is what I stated—

● (1512)

**Some hon. Members:** Oh, oh!