

Mr. Clarke: Mr. Speaker, I would suggest the minister refer to the remarks of the former prime minister. Finally, I want to ask him, in reference to what he said on Wednesday about amending legislation, what plans does the government have to amend legislation and what would they be proposing to amend such legislation?

Mr. Cullen: Mr. Speaker, it seemed to me, on the surface, that it was important, in the interest of helping the RCMP both with security and with criminal investigations, that information of this kind should be made available to assist them in that particular enterprise, but because this subject matter is being looked at by the McDonald commission it would be somewhat premature to suggest the kind of legislation we would have in mind.

RCMP TELEX ACCESS

Mr. Bill Jarvis (Perth-Wilmot): Mr. Speaker, my question is to the same minister. Going back to 1964, the assurance made by the then prime minister, Mr. Pearson, about the confidentiality of social insurance numbers, subsequent to which, in or about 1969, direct telex access to computer information was given—not just to the RCMP but, indeed, to approximately 800 police forces across Canada which would work through the commercial crime unit in Ottawa and have equal access to this information—can the minister tell us whether the telex access was given for all purposes, not just investigating UIC fraud but for all purposes, with ministerial knowledge and approval or by order of a predecessor of the present minister? In other words, what happened in 1969 which opened all computer files by this telex system; and was it with the knowledge and approval of the responsible minister of the day?

Hon. Bud Cullen (Minister of Employment and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, I am not certain that that particular date is, in fact, appropriate. It may be that the memory of the individual who was giving evidence indicated that this information had been made available. According to my information, this kind of information had been made available since the forties when the legislation first came into effect. There was a discretion exercised at that time by the commission that was somewhat broader than apparently we have authority to give. That is why I had to give instructions that it was no longer to be made available.

Mr. Jarvis: Mr. Speaker, I compliment the minister for making that order, which I think may have been prompted by my colleague, the hon. member for Hamilton West. But that does not matter.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Jarvis: Mr. Speaker, I think the minister was quite frank in admitting that earlier in the week. The minister said, in reply to my colleague from Vancouver Quadra, that it was the commissioner's interpretation—and I think he said that quite deliberately—rather than the minister's interpretation of

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section 126 and predecessor sections of the same nature, and be referred to the fuzzy nature of that particular section in its interpretation. Was there never a legal interpretation requested by a responsible minister subsequent to, say, 1964, the date of the Pearson assurance, until just recently when the minister took the initiative for which I commend him? I am speaking of a legal interpretation of what he described as a rather fuzzy section.

Mr. Cullen: Mr. Speaker, I doubt that there would have been a legal opinion obtained by the minister in view of the discretion exercised prior to the amendment which was made at the request of the hon. member for Hamilton West when Bill C-27 was before the House. Prior to that particular section being amended, the discretion rested with the commission and I would expect that they secured an opinion, were satisfied that they were correct or assumed they had that authority.

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POST OFFICE

SUGGESTED REDUCTION OF EMPLOYEES

Mr. John Rodriguez (Nickel Belt): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Postmaster General. Can the Postmaster General confirm that substantial cutbacks in the manpower of the Post Office are now being actively implemented and that a national plan is being developed in which some 3,000 to 3,500 man-years of work will be eliminated by the fiscal year 1981-82?

Hon. J.-Gilles Lamontagne (Postmaster General): Mr. Speaker, there is no question of cut-backs of the workers in the Post Office. I am sure the hon. member is referring in his question to an article which appeared in a newspaper recently, saying that there would be a cutback of 269 employees in the Post Office. It is very wrong.

● (1122)

Of course, I cannot stop my management from supplying me with studies on ways they could maybe save some money in the Post Office, when sometimes we are accused of having large deficits and being inefficient. These cutbacks if any will be made with the collaboration of the unions and will come about mainly by attrition. There is no question of someone losing their job in the Post Office.

Mr. Rodriguez: A supplementary question. In view of the fact that I have in my hand a plan called "Ontario Postal Region Business Plan Summary 1978-1982", in view of the fact that the minister said these cutbacks will come about through attrition, and in view of the fact that in this plan it specifically states that the instructions and guidelines to management in the Post Office are to optimize use of part-time help in districts across the region, I ask the Postmaster General how he squares what he has just said with the instruction in the plan that they must maximize and optimize use of casual