

Oral Questions

have done so because people are still trying to attribute improper motives to me.

ALLEGATIONS AGAINST SEAFARERS' INTERNATIONAL UNION—POSSIBLE WARNING TO PRIME MINISTER, CABINET MINISTERS NOT ACCEPT CAMPAIGN CONTRIBUTIONS FROM UNION

Hon. Robert L. Stanfield (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, granted that the minister felt that the action taken regarding the complaint in 1972 was appropriate at the time, but did it not occur to the minister that his department might have to deal with this matter of alleged violence and intimidation in the SIU, and that consequently this would involve a potential conflict of interest, with the possibility of the government having to deal with it? In view of the minister's knowledge of this complaint and, presumably, his awareness that the government might have to deal with it eventually, did the minister inform the Prime Minister of his decision and his position, with a view to warning other cabinet colleagues that it might be important for the government to have to deal with this whole question at arm's length, so that they would be warned against accepting contributions from the SIU in the event that the matter did develop further?

Hon. John C. Munro (Minister of Labour): Mr. Speaker, as I indicated to the Leader of the Official Opposition yesterday, no, I did not take it up with the Prime Minister. The position I have always taken is that I have assumed, and I think correctly, that members of parliament on both sides of the House at election time do receive contributions, and that this does not constitute a conflict of interest. The contributions come from various sources. I am sure that the Leader of the Official Opposition's own party receives contributions from corporations and goodness knows who else during the course of an election which may involve positions on policy that are going to be taken later. I have yet to hear any member of the House suggest to the Leader of the Official Opposition or to the Conservative party that the positions they take on policy matters once the election is over are in any way affected by the contributions they have received. We give them sufficient credit, which they are not apparently prepared to give me, for basic integrity in this regard.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Stanfield: Mr. Speaker, without the minister thinking that I am attacking his integrity, I should like to ask him whether he considers it appropriate for a Minister of Labour to accept a contribution from a union about which complaints have been made in the department, as the minister knows, concerning violence and intimidation. Does the minister feel it is wrong for me to question him as to whether he did not feel that there was a potential conflict of interest there, and as to whether, in view of that, he did not take the matter to the Prime Minister so as to warn other colleagues who might find themselves in an embarrassing position?

Mr. Munro (Hamilton East): Mr. Speaker, at that time there were no outstanding complaints against this particular union. There had been one in a previous administration which had been dealt with, I think in a proper fashion. I

[Mr. Munro (Hamilton East).]

am not going to be one of those who condemns a union, a corporation or an individual or in any way impugns them on the basis of no evidence. If during the course of an election I am going to accept contributions from companies and unions, I will do so in the same way as everybody else does so, namely on the assumption that they are valid and legal corporations or individuals. If it turns out differently later on, then I will take the appropriate action against them, just as anybody else would, and just, I trust, as the Leader of the Official Opposition would.

ALLEGATIONS AGAINST SEAFARERS' INTERNATIONAL UNION—EVIDENCE NEEDED TO ESTABLISH NECESSITY FOR INDEPENDENT INQUIRY

Mr. Sinclair Stevens (York-Simcoe): Mr. Speaker, may I direct a question to the Acting Prime Minister. In view of five charges having been laid to date by the police against SIU members for offences ranging from the dangerous use of firearms to assault occasioning bodily harm, all charges having arisen from waterfront violence, and in view of further allegations of violence and intimidation within the union, will the Acting Prime Minister indicate what further evidence he feels is necessary before an independent inquiry can be commissioned to look into these matters, bearing in mind that we are dealing with a federally chartered union that has a similar record of violence as set out more fully in the Norris Commission Report of some 10 years ago?

● (1120)

Hon. Mitchell Sharp (Acting Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, the evidence we have received so far does not seem to us to justify an inquiry of this kind.

An hon. Member: Let us see it.

Mr. Sharp: This is one of the reasons my colleague, the Minister of Justice, has been in touch with the authorities in Ontario who would have the evidence of violence and the kind of information to which the hon. member has alluded. So far we have not received evidence of the kind that would justify us launching such an inquiry.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. Before permitting the hon. member to ask a final supplementary question on the subject, and I might say that I do not want to interfere with his right to pose questions, I should indicate that the question has been taken in this sense: Has the government or the Acting Prime Minister sufficient evidence now to warrant an inquiry? That would be a proper question, and it was that kind of question to which the answer was given. However, a question which went on to ask what further evidence or what specific evidence would be required in the future to constitute that kind of an inquiry would be hypothetical to begin with, if not the subject of some other disability. However, I will permit the hon. member a supplementary.