

was an attempt to get fairness for the ministers involved, fairness that would be perceived by the public. The Prime Minister may not consider the statements made by Mr. Higgitt to be grave, but I can assure him that all Canadians interested in the principle of the rule of law do indeed consider them to be grave, if accurate. So I would like to ask him a question, and I hope he will give a straightforward answer. When these accusations or statements made by Mr. Higgitt, namely, that ministers were informed both orally and in writing about the illegal activities that were undertaken or about to be undertaken by the RCMP, are discussed before the McDonald inquiry, will the Prime Minister assure the House that counsel for the government will not request that those hearings be held in camera but, in fact, will do the opposite: request that they be held openly so the people of Canada can hear all that ought to be heard?

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Trudeau: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member corrects me and says that the matter is grave. Of course it is grave, and it is because it is grave that I have urged members on the other side and members of the media to report this in a way that does not suggest that there is any guilty person involved. We will see. That is the job of the commission to find if indeed—and they, I believe, are the first two items of the terms of reference—there has been any breaking of the law by police officers, by ministers of the Crown or by anybody in between.

We believe that if the commission made such a report, we would not hesitate to refer the subject matter to the attorneys general of the provinces where the alleged misdeed would have been committed. The Minister of Justice said this a few days ago. I said it a couple of weeks ago in this House. We even went on to say that in matters where confidentiality and secrecy were involved, we would bend over backwards to make sure that no privilege or secrecy was invoked if it were a matter of attempting to hide some guilty person. But this being said, I leave it to the commission to decide if a hearing of any minister or of any commissioner or former RCMP officer of whatever rank be in camera or in public. I think that when the hon. gentleman is suggesting that if something happens in camera, the people of the country, Canadians, and members of the House can have no confidence, I am suggesting they are casting very serious aspersions on the commission itself.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Trudeau: It is not the credibility of the commission which should be attacked here. I understand the credibility of the government is attacked. We have said to the commission “okay, you hear the matter”. But surely we have to trust somebody. If we are taking as a definite position that the commission cannot be trusted when it operates in camera, then let's abolish the commission.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Oral Questions

Mr. Broadbent: Mr. Speaker, I am tempted to suggest that the Prime Minister needs a little lift in the lower part of his anatomy.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Broadbent: He took almost two minutes, again, Mr. Speaker, not to answer the question, which is very serious.

This morning before the commission, Mr. Nuss, acting on behalf of the government, once again intervened, once again requested a certain matter not be discussed, and in fact he was following the general request made earlier by the government, acting under the old cabinet secrecy provision that could undermine the credibility of this whole commission. I ask the Prime Minister: will he give a clear answer this time? When the matter of whether or not the ministers were informed, orally or in writing, is discussed before the commission by the ministers themselves, will he make sure that counsel does not request an in-camera session at that point but urges that the session be in public?

Mr. Trudeau: Mr. Speaker, we are, again, discussing some testimony before the commission of which I have no knowledge. I do not know under what circumstances—

An hon. Member: Check with your staff which was there this morning.

Mr. Trudeau: Mr. Speaker, if the opposition would shut up a little bit, I could—

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Trudeau: I do not know under what circumstances the lawyers of the commission made that representation. It may have had to do with some Privy Council secrets; I do not know. That is why I say it is unwise to ask me or any minister, day by day, to comment on the ongoing before the commission, whether it be testimony by a witness or whether it be actions by a lawyer. I do not instruct them daily and I do not follow daily what is happening, nor should I. I trust the commission.

● (1442)

When the hon. member is suggesting that the course pursued by this lawyer undermines the credibility of the commission—I think his words were—he is precisely showing that I had answered his question. I had even anticipated his very feeling that somehow when the commission goes in camera, its credibility is being undermined. That is what the Leader of the New Democratic Party says. I say that is not the view of the commission: we trust the commission whether it operates in camera or publicly.