

er, I will not comment, nor will I offer any judgment relating to the value of the evidence or indeed the completeness of it.

In relation to my own responsibilities and the discharge of my duties, in response to the hon. member for New Westminster (Mr. Leggatt) prior to answering his question, I expressed amazement that although he was making very serious allegations relating to certain statements that have been made, he evidently had not informed himself of the evidence that has been adduced before that commission. I am not saying to the hon. members that they ought not to make themselves completely familiar with the evidence before that commission and make representations to the government; I am just saying that I am not accepting as my responsibility a role as commissioner or counsel before that commission or adviser to the commissioners in some way. I will reply to questions put to me in a way that I feel will discharge the responsibilities I have accepted.

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

**Mr. Speaker:** Order, please. To a certain extent we are arguing a situation which is hypothetical—

**Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton):** It is like the devil, with respect.

**Mr. Speaker:** Order, please. Obviously before the matter can be tested questions will have to be put and responses received which will be the subject matter of a specific rather than a general argument. In any event, the matter has now been raised and I am prepared to hear further argument on it. It seems to me that we are talking about problems which are going to arise in the future and how the minister will deal with those questions. The argument I have heard today is not related specifically to answers or positions taken by the minister. I am not going to relate it to a question of privilege. If other members wish to do that today, I am prepared to do it.

**Mr. Joe Clark (Leader of the Opposition):** Mr. Speaker, I had not intended to get into this matter until I heard the Solicitor General (Mr. Blais) speak.

The Solicitor General in his remarks put forward the position he intends to follow as minister responsible to this House of Commons to report upon the activities of that department over a period of time. His position, Sir, which he has stated as the policy of the government, in summary is the following.

He has made it abundantly clear that he feels no obligation to tell anyone in parliament anything at all about anything that happened in the Department of the Solicitor General under his jurisdiction or any other jurisdiction. He said he believes—

**An hon. Member:** That is exactly what he said.

**Mr. Clark:** He said quite precisely, Mr. Speaker, that there is an ancient parliamentary tradition which allows a minister not to answer questions in the House, and he intends to use that parliamentary tradition not to answer questions which he feels he does not want to answer. That is what he said. It may

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well be he said that because he received advice from the hon. member for Eglinton (Mr. Sharp). He got in trouble that way before. That is precisely what he has said. He then went on to say—

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**Mr. Sharp:** I was sitting listening to the member.

**Mr. Clark:** I regret all these interruptions being shouted across the floor. He then went on to say that if he does choose to answer questions put by members of parliament about public business, he is not going to answer relating to matters that occurred before his appointment.

**Mr. Lang:** He said clearly the opposite.

**Mr. Clark:** As my colleague from Northumberland-Durham (Mr. Lawrence) pointed out, this raises a very serious question for this House of Commons. We are prevented now by a ruling of Your Honour from questioning the three previous ministers. This minister has now indicated that he does not intend to provide information about what went on in that period. The net result is that the House of Commons is left without an opportunity to get any information from anybody in this House about anything that went on in this matter.

The next limitation that he attached to any question he might answer, or any public information he might choose to give to the representatives of the people on a matter of the utmost seriousness and gravity to the country was that he will not comment on matters that are before a Royal Commission which his government established in part to try to evade the responsibility to answer questions here on the floor of the House of Commons.

**Mr. Lang:** You demanded it.

**Mr. Clark:** The minister has made his position very clear. He warned us that, even contrary to the practice of his predecessors, he intends to fall back on the idea that he need not answer questions in the House of Commons. It was a very simple, straightforward statement. I give him credit for frankness, even though in my judgment that is an insupportable position for a Solicitor General to take, particularly at this time. He then went on to say that if he does choose to answer, he will restrict himself to things that happened since his appointment.

Finally, he has served notice that he will stonewall and refuse to answer, staying silent in the face of any questions which arise that are being considered by a Royal Commission which this government created in part to avoid the responsibility of having to answer questions in this House of Commons.

This statement of policy by the new Solicitor General is a most inauspicious and dangerous way for him to start on his serious responsibilities, and raises a very serious question of privilege to the House. It is a matter of great surprise to us that this minister would take this position in the early days of his portfolio.