

Oral Questions

Mr. Fox: The Leader of the Opposition will have to make up his mind. In June of this year he was asking for a royal commission of inquiry into the practices and procedures followed by the RCMP. We now have such a commission. It is public, and it has all the requisite powers to enable it to look into those activities.

Some hon. Members: Not true!

Mr. Fox: If members of the opposition would cease listening to each other's drivel and read the terms of reference they would see that the commission clearly has all the powers necessary to follow any illegal act from person to person up to the highest levels of government.

RESPONSIBILITY FOR SECURITY SERVICES

Mr. Allan Lawrence (Northumberland-Durham): Believing that it is the security and intelligence services of the government and not necessarily the RCMP with regard to which we should get more information, may I ask the minister this: the Prime Minister is quoted on Friday last as saying that in 1974 or 1975—he was unsure of the year—he realized there was police surveillance of a democratic political party in this country—surveillance of the party itself and of members of that party. May I ask the Solicitor General, who is responsible to this House for security and intelligence services as well as for police services, whether he or any of his predecessors have found out what was the purpose of that investigation, on whose orders it was conducted and, finally, what investigation the government undertook at that time, and what were the modes and procedures of that surveillance?

[Translation]

Hon. Francis Fox (Solicitor General): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member's question is not very clear in my mind. He is asking me why there was surveillance in 1974 or in 1973. He obviously refers to an answer given by the Prime Minister during a press conference and he might take advantage of the Prime Minister's return to ask him the same question. As far as I am concerned, the procedures at this time are that we are trying, within the framework of a general mandate given the RCMP security services in 1975, to keep a close watch only over those groups who may be suspected of being subversive. This mandate refers to acts of espionage, terrorism, whether on the national or international level, to subversive acts and activities of foreign groups in Canada. It is quite clear, Mr. Speaker, that we do not generally carry out any surveillance of political parties, as the Prime Minister has already indicated, it is also quite clear that being a member of a political party, whether Liberal or Progressive Conservative or the New Democratic party or the Parti Québécois, does not give immunity to anyone who would tend to promote changes brought on by violent and undemocratic ways.

[Mr. Fox.]

[English]

ALLEGED ARSON AND THEFT OF DYNAMITE—NAME OF PERSON AUTHORIZING ACTIVITY

Mr. Allan Lawrence (Northumberland-Durham): Of course, my question to the minister was: on whose orders was this done and what investigation was initiated by the government on learning of that surveillance? As well, this morning, according to the national press, Mr. Claude Morin who is described as an executive assistant to the present Solicitor General, indicated last night that the federal government—this government—knew last September that the police in Quebec had been involved in an arson incident and the theft of dynamite. That was last September. On whose orders did that take place, and what investigation has the government made into the alleged circumstances and facts?

Hon. Francis Fox (Solicitor General): On the question of the facts, once again the hon. member is confused. I presume that what the newspaper article referred to was that this government, far from trying to conceal any facts, brought those facts to the attention of the attorney general of Quebec during September. On September 19, the deputy attorney general of the Department of Justice wrote a letter to the deputy attorney general of Quebec bringing these facts to his attention. That letter was delivered on September 20. As for the general allegations concerning the theft and the arson, the truth of the matter is that these questions were brought to our attention after my initial statement in the House on June 17 last. Those were, in part, the reasons the government decided to go ahead and launch a federal commission of inquiry, in order that the truth would come out and we would be able to establish once and for all the extent of any illegal break-in activities, clear the air for the RCMP and permit the RCMP security service to get on with the job which is essential to the security of this country.

● (1432)

ALLEGED ILLEGAL ACTIVITIES—REQUEST FOR CLARIFICATION OF PRIME MINISTER'S STATEMENT

Mr. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa-Whitby): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the Solicitor General. I do not use the word lightly and I use it carefully. The Solicitor General may disagree, but I think we are clearly involved in a coverup in this matter involving the cabinet.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Broadbent: I have a quotation by the Prime Minister which seems to indicate that in the most unequivocal terms. I want to ask the Solicitor General for his interpretation of it. The Prime Minister is quoted in last Saturday's *Globe*, October 29, as saying the following:

When we found they—

That is with reference to the RCMP.

—were doing something illegal we told them to stop it and we told them they might have to be subject to due process of law for it.