

Oral Questions

ment in total, including my cabinet colleagues and, as I have just indicated to the hon. member, my cabinet colleagues have not had the opportunity to take a look at it yet.

Mr. Maurice Harquail (Restigouche): Mr. Speaker, my supplementary question is to the Solicitor General. In view of the obvious conflict between statements by the Prime Minister and the Solicitor General with respect to the administration of justice, and the Prime Minister's statement in this House that he is seeking ways and means to contravene the law—

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Harquail: Can the Solicitor General inform the House what his position is?

An hon. Member: Order.

● (1430)

Mr. Harquail: The Minister of Justice, not being here, what is the Solicitor General's position with respect to finding ways and means to break the law of this country?

Mr. Lawrence: Mr. Speaker, unlike some of the practices carried on under the previous administration—

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Lawrence:—there is no knowledge on my part of any illegal acts now being carried on by any law enforcement agency. In respect of future activities, I would suggest to the hon. member that obviously he, the public, members of the House and everyone else will be fully apprised of the government's policy when the legislation is presented.

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POST OFFICE

REGULATIONS THEREOF

Mr. Robert Daudlin (Essex-Kent): Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Postmaster General, but in his absence I will put it to the Acting Prime Minister. Hon. members and the Acting Prime Minister will know that section 43 of the Post Office Act currently provides the following:

Notwithstanding anything in any other act or law, nothing is liable to demand seizure or detention while in the course of post except as provided in this act or the regulations.

Perhaps the Acting Prime Minister could tell us whether or not he is aware of the Postmaster General's declaration outside this House that he, in fact, upheld the sanctity of first-class mail as being his prime responsibility in that role. Perhaps he could assure us that in fact the Postmaster General will continue to be instructed by the government that the sanctity of first-class mail is to be preserved?

Hon. Lincoln M. Alexander (Acting Postmaster General): Mr. Speaker, I have no hesitation in assuring the hon. member, if that is his position—which I think is the position of

[Mr. Lawrence.]

everyone—that the sanctity of first-class mail is uppermost in everyone's mind. I think the hon. member must have a supplementary question, because he would not ask such an innocent question without having a supplementary.

Mr. Daudlin: Mr. Speaker—

An hon. Member: Sock it to him.

Mr. Daudlin:—it is good that the minister anticipates my supplementary. Once again, I would ask the Acting Prime Minister this question: Given the fact that the Postmaster General declared, outside this House, that he opposed the sanctity of first-class mail and given that, in fact, we have heard the Solicitor General in other places indicating matters quite to the contrary, could the Acting Prime Minister tell us whether or not he supports the legislation as it now exists, whether or not he is moving in other directions, and whether or not the minister who is absent or the minister who is present is speaking for this government?

Mr. Alexander: Well, I know what the hon. member is trying to get at, but he does not have the guts to put the question bluntly and straightforwardly.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Alexander: If the minister were here, he would answer your question. I would state, respectfully, that I will take the hon. member's hidden question as notice so that I can pass it on to the Postmaster General in order that he will be in a position to answer the question.

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FREEDOM OF INFORMATION

OPENING OF MAIL

Hon. J.-J. Blais (Nipissing): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Acting Prime Minister. It follows the question that was asked by the hon. member for Essex-Kent. We were witnesses of two blatantly and diametrically opposed statements by, on the one hand, the Solicitor General of Canada and, on the other hand, the Postmaster General of Canada dealing with the mail opening bill, on the one hand, one saying it ought to be extended and, on the other hand, the Postmaster General indicating he would defend his position on the sanctity of the mail when it came to cabinet.

In view of the fact that the Prime Minister himself, at his press conference, indicated he favoured the extension of the authority to open mail—and he said that quite categorically—was he speaking for the government at the time when he made that statement?

Hon. Walter Baker (President of Privy Council and Minister of National Revenue): I want to thank the hon. gentleman for the question. The Prime Minister always speaks for the government. The Prime Minister was indicating at the press conference he was holding that the matter was under