

Oral Questions

[English]

Mr. Nielsen: Mr. Speaker, either the Acting Prime Minister did not get the gist of the question or chose to ignore it.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Nielsen: My question was this: does the capability exist to monitor and tape telephone calls, particularly long distance telephone calls, of members? Perhaps he could reply to that at a later time after looking into it.

My final supplementary question is: if tapes are kept of telephone conversations, particularly long distance calls, are these tapes listened to on a regular basis at meetings of officers of various deputy ministers, for instance, the deputy minister to the Postmaster General?

Mr. Chrétien: Mr. Speaker, I do not know of any capacity or any capability of this organization to do that. We are here today experiencing a fishing expedition, and I think fishing is better in the Yukon than in Ottawa.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hnatyshyn: It depends on what you catch.

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ROYAL CANADIAN MOUNTED POLICE**ALLEGED ILLEGAL ACTIVITIES—REASON FOR WITHHOLDING INFORMATION FROM CABINET COMMITTEE**

Mr. David MacDonald (Egmont): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Solicitor General and it refers to two answers which he gave yesterday. Since the Solicitor General confirmed yesterday once again that the illegal break-in had been "authorized by the most senior level of the security service of the RCMP, and that was by the person holding the rank of director general", and later in an answer to me he said that the cabinet committee on security and intelligence did not know about the illegal break-in, arson and theft because "everyone within the security service at that time, including the director general of the security service, did not consider it to be an illegal operation", I wonder if he can tell the House what made the director general think it was legal? Why was the information on this activity deliberately withheld from the cabinet committee for a period of some years?

Hon. Francis Fox (Solicitor General): Mr. Speaker, I think there is a commission of inquiry which will have the full opportunity to explore those matters in detail.

Mr. Clark: This is the House of Commons.

Mr. Fox: It will have the opportunity of examining the director general and to hear his story. I do not intend to put words into the mouth of the then director general of the security service. I assume the proper place for this type of thing is in front of the royal commission of inquiry. We do not

[Mr. Chrétien.]

see why we have set up a royal commission of inquiry if we are going to conduct an inquiry on the floor of this House.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Fox: Perhaps the hon. members opposite could make up their minds as to whether they want a royal commission of inquiry, for which they themselves pressed for a long time, or whether they want us to talk about the details on the floor of this House.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. MacDonald (Egmont): Mr. Speaker, the Solicitor General cannot have it both ways. He cannot make a statement in this chamber on Friday on one of the most important issues which has come before this House for some time and then expect that questions as to ministerial information and responsibility are not going to be answered in this House.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

MANDATE GIVEN TO SECURITY AND INTELLIGENCE SERVICE

Mr. David MacDonald (Egmont): The Solicitor General may be a fancy skater, but he has a responsibility to this House. If he is not able to inform the House, perhaps the Acting Prime Minister could, because he is all we have to deal with today. What was the mandate given to the security and intelligence services of the government by the cabinet committee on security and intelligence from 1970 on, which would have led senior officers to believe illegal activities would be justified if not publicly acceptable?

Hon. Francis Fox (Solicitor General): Mr. Speaker, there was no mandate given to the security service at any time indicating that illegal activities were justifiable in any way. The point has been made time and time again that all their activities had to be carried out within the framework of the law. There are a lot of people on the other side who are willing to judge and would apparently like to be appointed to the bench; but the judgment they are showing in this House certainly is not to their credibility.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gillies: You are the one who reported it.

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GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATION**POSSIBILITY SECURITY INFORMATION STORED IN PRIVY COUNCIL COMPUTER—GOVERNMENT POSITION**

Mr. David MacDonald (Egmont): Mr. Speaker, my final supplementary is for the Acting Prime Minister. Perhaps he will be able to clarify this situation. With respect to the secret million dollar computer located in the basement of the East Block, which serves the Privy Council and the Prime Minister's office, can the Acting Prime Minister indicate whether