

Oral Questions

Opposition on the vote he received over the weekend. We all agree he has a great future as Leader of the Opposition.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Chrétien: I think the first thing he should know as leader of his party is that we do not answer hypothetical questions.

Mr. Clark: One of the things we know as members of the House of Commons is that ministers do not answer policy questions.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Clark: I am interested in a question of policy based on the expectation that the government, knowing that the chairman of the Royal Commission has indicated that he is considering issuing a subpoena to the Prime Minister, will have established a policy on this question—any government which looks ahead would have done so. I want to know what is the policy of the government of Canada with regard to the response to a subpoena to the Prime Minister and whether any limit would be placed upon the Prime Minister or his colleagues with regard to disclosure relative to matters which are now before the McDonald Royal Commission.

[Translation]

Mr. Chrétien: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Justice said earlier that the terms of reference of the McDonald inquiry commission give them all the necessary powers to discover all the facts which are relevant to the inquiry.

Mr. Clark: I have a supplementary. The essential question is whether the government of Canada is prepared to see the Prime Minister accept this subpoena by the McDonald inquiry commission, and if such a decision is made by the government, whether evidence by the Prime Minister or other ministers will be restricted.

Mr. Chrétien: Mr. Speaker, I have nothing to add to what I said earlier. The Leader of the Opposition asked me a hypothetical question. We do not know whether it will be necessary to serve subpoenas. All the facts pertaining to the record will be available to the chairman and the commissioners, and I think they will really be in a position to make a quite useful report in the best interest of all Canadians.

[English]

ALLEGED ILLEGAL ACTIVITIES—SUGGESTION FORMER SOLICITOR GENERAL BE ALLOWED TO ANSWER QUESTIONS

Mr. Bill Jarvis (Perth-Wilmot): A supplementary to the Acting Prime Minister. Given that the government will now allow the former solicitor general, the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs, to testify before the McDonald Royal Commission, will the Acting Prime Minister, as a matter of policy, accept in a positive way a motion which would permit that minister to answer questions about government security services in this House of Commons?

[Mr. Chrétien.]

[Translation]

Hon. Jean Chrétien (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, I feel that I answered that very same question a while ago.

[English]

Mr. Speaker: It seems to me there is a vast difference between the question asked by the hon. member and the question just asked by the Leader of the Opposition. I did not interfere during the earlier question because, although certain of its aspects were hypothetical, it seemed to me the hon. gentleman was inquiring as to present policy and whether the government was in a position to disclose any policy. But the hon. member for Perth-Wilmot is talking about a motion which has no existence at the moment and about circumstances which are purely hypothetical.

● (1422)

ALLEGED ILLEGAL ACTIVITIES—REASON FORMER SOLICITOR GENERAL HAD NO BRIEFINGS BY FORCE

Mr. Bill Jarvis (Perth-Wilmot): I would not have expected to get an answer anyway, Mr. Speaker. Let me put another question to the Acting Prime Minister in the absence of the Solicitor General. Given that the present Solicitor General apparently now has weekly briefings from security service officers, thereby at least acknowledging some degree of responsibility at the ministerial level for the activities of government security agencies, would the Acting Prime Minister tell this House why the present Solicitor General's predecessor apparently had no such briefings? In other words, the previous Solicitor General knew nothing about anything: the question is why?

Hon. Jean Chrétien (Acting Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, I do not think that the statement of the hon. member is based on the facts. All Solicitors General have received regular briefings from the RCMP on matters of security.

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MANPOWER

LAY-OFFS BY RAILWAYS—GOVERNMENT ACTION TO COUNTERACT

Mr. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa-Whitby): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the Minister of Employment and Immigration. As the minister knows, the most recent government figures indicate that some 70,000 lay-offs are taking place each month in Canada, an alarming and worsening situation which affects almost every sector of our economy. I should like to ask the minister, with reference to a particular sector, namely the railways, what his department is now doing given the decision that has recently been made affecting the lay-offs of some 6,000 Canadians in that particular sector.

Hon. Bud Cullen (Minister of Employment and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, without getting into specifics, I think the hon. member, of all people, should know the many splendid