

POSSIBLE POLITICAL LINKS IN INVESTIGATION INTO
DREDGING CONTRACTS—REQUEST FOR INDEPENDENT
INQUIRY

Hon. Robert L. Stanfield (Leader of the Opposition): In view of the nature of the charges laid and the office which the hon. gentleman holds, would the Solicitor General not agree that his response is extremely unsatisfactory; it must lead to suspicions—suspicions which arise from the evidence and the fact that the Solicitor General has not regarded it as important enough to satisfy himself as to the nature of the material. I do not think this is fair to the Minister of Labour or to anybody else. I ask the Acting Prime Minister whether, in view of the unsatisfactory nature of the response of the Solicitor General and the suspicions which exist in the public mind, he is not prepared to commit the government to an independent judicial inquiry to examine possible political connections with waterfront activities which have led to these charges of wrongdoing?

Hon. Mitchell Sharp (Acting Prime Minister): I can only repeat what I said yesterday: the answer is in the negative. If the Leader of the Opposition has some evidence of this kind to lay before the House there might be some reason for action. I have listened to my colleague, the Solicitor General, who gave an answer which I am sure must have been agreeable to the Leader of the Opposition, that it would not be in the interests of justice to reveal, as he requested, information which might prejudice the trial of people whose innocence must be presumed until they are found guilty.

Mr. Allmand: On a question of privilege, Mr. Speaker. The Leader of the Opposition has made certain disparaging remarks about me and my answers. The answers I have given to the House with respect to the investigation are answers of a kind which have consistently been given by law officers of the Crown, whether provincial or federal, throughout time. I have checked this out. It is contrary to sound practice for a law officer of the Crown to reveal details of an investigation while it is still under way.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Stanfield: Will either the Acting Prime Minister or the Solicitor General explain to me how it would prejudice anybody who is subject to any charge, or likely to be subject to any charge, for the Solicitor General to indicate to the House that the material taken from the office of the Minister of Labour is not being used in connection with any further investigation, or not being used in connection with any trial which is taking place—or, on the other hand, if it is? Would anybody explain to me how this information could possibly prejudice anybody's trial?

Mr. Allmand: Mr. Speaker, there were no doubt several documents taken from the Minister of Labour's office. Some were used as leads in following up other evidence. This is an operational matter, not one that I, as Solicitor General, would check into. The police are free to pursue their own investigations. I am not involved with the prosecutions and I do not know what evidence will or will not be used.

Oral Questions

INVESTIGATION INTO DREDGING CONTRACTS—SUGGESTED
REFERENCE TO COMMITTEE

Mr. James A. McGrath (St. John's East): Mr. Speaker, I have a supplementary question for the Acting Prime Minister and government House leader. In view of the fact that the government refuses our request, which we initially made in the House two weeks ago, for a full scale public inquiry to put to rest some of the intriguing political ramifications of this whole affair, is the government House leader now prepared to bring in an appropriate reference of this matter either to a special committee or to a standing committee of the House which would enable members of the House to direct questions to ministers who held particular responsibility at the time of the commencement of the investigation and to whom, under the rules and practices of the House, we cannot now direct questions?

Hon. Mitchell Sharp (Acting Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, I have seen no reason to make such a reference. Nothing that has been said from the opposition side has convinced me that there would be anything to refer to a committee. There are now under way prosecutions of a number of businessmen who may have engaged in bid-rigging and in fraud. They are being prosecuted. I want that process to continue and I hope my hon. friend does, too. I have seen no evidence of there being any other activities which would justify a reference of this kind to committee.

Mr. McGrath: A final supplementary question, Mr. Speaker. Is the government House leader, then, prepared, as a means of making a reference, to refer, for example, the reports of the Auditor General for 1963, 1966, 1967, 1970 and 1973, wherein he singles out government dredging contracts, the suggestion being, of course, that there were no proper departmental audits? This would form an appropriate reference to the public accounts committee, where we would then be in a position to call witnesses.

Mr. Sharp: Mr. Speaker, I understand that they have already been referred.

INVESTIGATION INTO DREDGING CONTRACTS—GOVERNMENT
VIEW OF NECESSITY FOR PUBLIC INQUIRY

Mr. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa-Whitby): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the Acting Prime Minister. Both in the House yesterday and again today in reply to questions regarding the need for a public inquiry into a situation that is causing considerable concern throughout the country, the minister suggested that in terms of the criminal law correct procedures are already being taken. I and my party fully agree with what the Solicitor General has said in that regard. I want to put to the minister another question. The Inquiries Act deals, not with criminal proceedings, but has broader terms of reference. Since one of the purposes of the Inquiries Act is to enable an inquiry to be made, and I quote, "into anything connected with the good government of Canada", and since under the act the government has, if "it deems it expedient", authority to initiate such an inquiry, then considering this broader scope—

Some hon. Members: Question.