

Oral Questions

In the present situation the questions which have arisen are questions which are similar to questions which have arisen before but are not connected with actions taken at the moment by a minister, as minister, but connected with actions taken by a minister in a former capacity at a former time in that capacity. That is the distinction that I think must hold at all times; that no questions can be put today to a minister of this House about steps that he has taken in a former capacity. An order to do so surely would permit questions to be put, for example, to the hon. member for Eglinton who is no longer a member of cabinet. That is the distinction, and I think it must be maintained at all times.

The hon. member for St. John's East.

BREAK-IN AT L'AGENCE DE PRESSE LIBRE—CONSULTATION WITH SOLICITOR GENERAL PRIOR TO STATEMENT ISSUED BY MINISTER OF SUPPLY AND SERVICES

Mr. James A. McGrath (St. John's East): Mr. Speaker, I am not going to argue your ruling because the rules do not permit me to do so.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McGrath: Given the dilemma of the situation arising out of our rules perhaps you might permit me to direct a question to the Minister of Supply and Services based on a statement he made on June 2, issued on his letterhead as Minister of Supply and Services. The minister said:

I can give the assurance, however, that if I felt responsible for any wrongdoing whether by commission or omission I would not wait for his statement—

He was referring to the Solicitor General.

—and all in respect to parliament and to Canadians I would submit my resignation.

A commendable suggestion I may say, Mr. Speaker.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McGrath: Based on that statement of June 2, I should like to ask the Minister of Supply and Services if he can tell the House whether he consulted with his colleague the Solicitor General prior to making that statement? What was the nature of those discussions? Did they include the very serious allegations contained in the letter and the meeting arising from that letter with Commissioner Higgitt regarding the allegations of the involvement of the RCMP in an illegal break-in?

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. I am prepared to hear argument from the hon. member at three o'clock and from other hon. members—I see there are several. At the moment the connection with the statement is not sufficient in my opinion to permit the question. I will hear argument at three o'clock.

A supplementary, the hon. member for Hamilton West.

[Mr. Speaker.]

BREAK-IN AT L'AGENCE DE PRESSE LIBRE—DESIRE OF MINISTER OF SUPPLY AND SERVICES TO ANSWER QUESTIONS

Mr. Lincoln M. Alexander (Hamilton West): Mr. Speaker, I think we must get to the nitty-gritty of this matter. In light of the fact that there have been several allegations and innuendos thrown out this afternoon and on other days, and knowing that the Minister of Supply and Services would like to make a statement and would like to answer questions—

An hon. Member: Sure, he would.

Mr. Alexander: —in order to clear up this murkiness, I would ask him one simple question: is he prepared to answer questions directed to him about his actions when he was the solicitor general of Canada in the year in question?

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. I might relieve the hon. member for Hamilton West of that difficulty because even if the minister said he was prepared to answer questions I would not let him.

BREAK-IN AT L'AGENCE DE PRESSE LIBRE—SUGGESTION PRIME MINISTER ASK MINISTER OF SUPPLY AND SERVICES TO MAKE STATEMENT

Mr. Ray Hnatyshyn (Saskatoon-Biggar): Mr. Speaker, I would like to take another tack on this whole proposition and let the Prime Minister show what kind of leadership he is prepared to give. In light of the fact that in prior answers to questions he indicated categorically that the then solicitor general, the Minister of Supply and Services, had no knowledge but only had some reference to the police in the correspondence from L'Agence de Presse Libre, and since it now appears that there was a specific telegram attached to that communication and there is an admission in the statement by the Solicitor General to the effect that the matter was considered—in order to put this matter precisely on the record and since according to your ruling we are not able to ask questions at the present time will the Prime Minister, as the leader of this country and this government, direct the Minister of Supply and Services to make a statement on motions or suggest to him at least that he make a statement on privilege so that we may have an opportunity to hear him in this House with respect to this very important matter before any public inquiry is undertaken by the Prime Minister?

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, it would be up to the hon. member if he felt his privileges were impinged upon by members opposite to ask Your Honour for permission to raise a question of privilege. I guess it is obvious from what has happened this afternoon that the Minister of Supply and Services has not felt his privileges have been seriously impinged upon because hon. members opposite have not brought any accusations forward.

Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton): He has condemned himself.