

Oral Questions

Mr. Munro (Hamilton East): Yes, Mr. Speaker, I think my colleagues the Postmaster General and the Solicitor General are well able to answer any questions of the Leader of the Official Opposition.

Hon. J.-J. Blais (Postmaster General): Mr. Speaker, in answer to the hon. gentleman's question, if not his comment, I might indicate that following the program last evening, and, like the gentleman, I followed it with a great deal of interest, I obtained a report from my security and investigation officials. I have been advised that there is no change and has not been any in the policy of the Post Office. I refer to the policy that was made in this House by Bryce Mackasey two years ago, and the one I adopted and have enforced, namely, that there is not to be any intervention in respect of first class mail or, indeed, in respect of any regular mail unless it is authorized by the Post Office Act. This means there is no interference and no removal of the mail, save and except in certain instances where co-operation is sought by the RCMP. There is co-operation provided by the Post Office relating to the covers and the information contained on said covers. At no time is the mail taken from the custody of the Post Office or diverted from the ordinary mail channels.

Mr. Clark: Mr. Speaker, the minister has told us what is the policy of the government. Can he tell us as a result of his inquiry what the practice has been, whether in fact there has been any departure from the policy, and whether in fact there has been any kind of interception of or dealing with mail by security officers in violation of the Post Office Act, which I remind the minister allows intervention only in two cases; one, where the mail is undeliverable, and the other relating to customs questions? Can he give us the unequivocal assurance now that there have been no instances of intervention with the mail of a private citizen in any way other than that authorized by law?

Mr. Blais: Mr. Speaker, following the investigation I have conducted with my own security investigation personnel I stand by my statement. There was one instance I was made aware of last year in late October or early November in respect of which I caused an investigation to be conducted. It came to my attention that, indeed, the policy had been somewhat stretched. I directed my security investigation personnel to direct all field officers to abide by the policy I have described, and I am advised that is being done. I have no information from my security and investigation people to date that would indicate anything to the contrary has taken place.

GUIDELINES FOR INTERCEPTION OF MAIL BY SECURITY SERVICE

Mr. Joe Clark (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, if I understood what the Postmaster General said earlier, he indicated to us there were exceptions and those exceptions had to do with requests by security services to look at mail. Will he tell us what guidelines exist, and would he care to table those guidelines regarding the conditions under which security ser-

[Mr. Clark.]

vices of the government of Canada, under whatever heading, have the right to look at the mail or deal with the mail of a private citizen?

Hon. J.-J. Blais (Postmaster General): Mr. Speaker, there are no specific guidelines. What takes place is that the RCMP makes a request of the field officers of security and investigation. That request is then channeled to my head of security and investigation in Ottawa. He studies the particular request and authorizes co-operation between the RCMP and postal officials. That co-operation relates to investigations being carried on by the RCMP. Again I suggest to the hon. gentleman, the fact is that the investigation is conducted at the Post Office premises and it is only with reference to the cover information on the envelope.

● (1422)

MINISTERIAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR SECURITY SERVICE

Miss Flora MacDonald (Kingston and the Islands): Mr. Speaker, I have a further question for the Acting Prime Minister on this fundamental issue of ministerial responsibility in the field of national security. I should like to refer to a statement by the Minister of National Health and Welfare yesterday when she referred to unfounded serious allegations. She was describing statements attributed to her in the *Charlatan* newspaper at Carleton University. I should like to ask the Acting Prime Minister with regard to this part of the transcript, "there is no way somebody is going to tell me that as a Quebecer there was a state of national emergency somewhere in Quebec and some threats to God knows what"—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. In fairness, it would take a great stretch of the rules of the House to see that as a supplementary. I will see the hon. member for Kingston and the Islands in one moment.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Speaker: The hon. member for Saskatoon-Biggar on a point of order.

Mr. Hnatyshyn: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The fact of the matter is that it is clear the questions posed by the hon. Leader of the Opposition at the outset and those following by the hon. member for Kingston and the Islands, dealt specifically with the role of security services under the government, the position the cabinet takes with respect to same, and the question by the Leader of the Opposition dealt with the mechanisms used in surveillance. There was an answer with respect to that particular aspect. It seems to me that the question of ministerial responsibility has been brought into focus by the hon. Leader of the Opposition, and it is only appropriate that we are able to carry on at this juncture with questions with respect to that.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!