

Oral Questions

Mr. Stevens: Outrageous!

Mr. Gillies: You don't care about ministerial responsibility!

Mr. Fox: Mr. Speaker, there are a myriad of issues involved with this question which concerns the national security of our country. There are matters related to counter-espionage, there are matters relating to international activities within our borders and these are subjects which cannot be set out in a public forum without affecting unduly the security of our country.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Fox: I believe any reasonable Canadian would come to the conclusion that when you are dealing with matters of national security there has to be a degree of discretion which is not readily available in the House of Commons. We are not trying to hide anything at all. We have already stated we would place all the files of the RCMP at the disposal of the commission. I have also directed that all the practices and procedures of the RCMP be brought to the attention of the commission in a clear manner. I would think that is the proper way of handling matters which affect the national security of our country, and that is why I disagree with the hon. member.

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● (1452)

POST OFFICE**ALLEGEDLY ILLEGAL OPENING OF MAIL—GOVERNMENT ACTION**

Hon. W. G. Dinsdale (Brandon-Souris): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Postmaster General. Yesterday the Postmaster General revealed in the House that he does not know what is going on in the security branch of his department with respect to the opening of the mail. The Solicitor General seems to be a little more forthcoming in the information he has given concerning these and other matters. Because these actions are clearly illegal, the hon. gentleman promised to investigate the subject further. Would he now give an updated report on these illegalities and also inform the House and the people of Canada, who are increasingly concerned over Canada's drift to police state tactics, what action he is taking to deal with the offenders?

Hon. J.-J. Blais (Postmaster General): Mr. Speaker, the comments of the hon. member which relate to police state tactics are surely not serious.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Clark: Are you kidding?

Mr. Blais: Yesterday, Mr. Speaker, I indicated to the House that I conducted an investigation with my security and investigation personnel and I had obtained information from them that there had not been any interception of the mails, which would be contrary to the Post Office Act. I indicated that to the hon. gentleman. I know there have been statements made

[Mr. Gillies.]

by the Solicitor General and I am aware of the statements that have been made.

Mr. Clark: You are also repudiating them.

Mr. Blais: I ask the hon. gentleman to look at those statements, and if he can give me any indication that personnel of the Post Office have been involved in opening the mail and he can specify some instance or incidents, I would be glad to look into them.

I would indicate to the hon. gentleman, Mr. Speaker, that with the assistance of senior personnel within the Post Office I looked into every potential allegation, such as the one which was made on one radio station in Ottawa this morning, to ascertain whether there is any ground upon which the allegations relating to interception of the mails can be made, and I ascertained, in that particular instance and in other instances, that there are no grounds for those allegations, to the best of the information of my security and investigation services.

Mr. Dinsdale: Mr. Speaker, it is obvious that the Solicitor General has information which is not available to his colleague, the Postmaster General, and I hope the two of them get together on this vital issue. The Postmaster General has indicated that there are 14 ex-RCMP officers on his security staff. Has the hon. gentleman assured himself that they are not part of Operation Cathedral, pursuing their illegal operations in the Post Office without reference to the Postmaster General; and does he not believe—

An hon. Member: We have one on this side too, if you really want to know.

Mr. Dinsdale: Just contain your patience over there. I am addressing this question to the Postmaster General, not to the Minister of Employment and Immigration. Does the Postmaster General not believe that under our system of responsible parliamentary democracy he has responsibility for ensuring that all operations of this kind are within the law; and will he give the assurance to the House and to the people that this is the way affairs are being conducted by the government?

Mr. Blais: Yes, Mr. Speaker, but I undertake my responsibility as a minister more seriously than the hon. gentleman takes his responsibility as critic of the Post Office for the loyal opposition. I conduct investigations into matters that can be investigated. I do not proceed by smearing the reputations of individuals and by imputing guilt by association, especially when that association arises out of the service of Canadian citizens with the RCMP, which is a federal police force which is indeed one that is worthy of our respect and is serious in the analysis of its procedures.

That is why I am conducting those investigations, and I will attempt to do so with every effort I can make, mindful of the role that the Post Office will have to play before the McDonald Commission when we are called upon to appear before that commission. It is fully my intention to do everything within my power to ascertain as many facts as possible in regard to procedures which the RCMP might have followed in