

the minister investigate the situation and find out whether such a letter was sent on that date and whether it was received?

An hon. Member: Read the letter!

Hon. Francis Fox (Solicitor General): Yes, Mr. Speaker.

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[Translation]

SMALL BUSINESS

SUGGESTION MEASURES BE TAKEN TO PROTECT SMALL BUSINESS

Mr. Gérard Laprise (Abitibi): Mr. Speaker, I know we have been discussing a very important topic in the last few days, but still we should not drop all other matters of importance in Canada. I should like to put a question to the Minister of State responsible for Small Business. Can he tell us whether the government, during the summer break which ended recently, studied the problems of small business in Canada and whether, as the minister in charge, he intends to take concrete steps, first, to define what small business is and, then, introduce efficient legislation to better protect it in Canada and enable it to develop normally?

[English]

Hon. A. C. Abbott (Minister of State (Small Business)): Mr. Speaker, my predecessor spent a year studying the problems of small business and a good many of these studies resulted in—

An hon. Member: More studies!

Mr. Abbott:—a declaration by myself on his behalf early in my tenure outlining a ten-point program. But I will confess that the program is somewhat skeletal and thereby hangs a requirement to flesh it out in the coming months. I think that as time goes by we will be bringing in definitive programs which I believe will meet many of the problems faced by small business today. I cannot say they will meet all those problems because small business, like large business today, is facing very serious difficulties. I think we are going to bring in a number of measures—the hon. member is aware of the recent introduction of the CALURA amendments which will go a long way to reducing paperwork now faced by 70,000 small businesses.

[Translation]

Mr. Laprise: Mr. Speaker, on a supplementary. As small and medium-sized businesses are an important source of employment both steady and new, can the minister tell us whether he intends to recommend that a committee of the House study the question as proposed recently, in ten points, by his predecessor?

[English]

Mr. Abbott: Well, Mr. Speaker, I hope that when I introduce measures in the House I shall have the full co-opera-

tion of hon. members. I trust that the hon. member for Abitibi will take part in the debate.

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NATIONAL SECURITY

POSSIBLE USE OF CENTRAL TELEPHONE SYSTEM TO KEEP UNDER SURVEILLANCE TELEPHONES IN OTTAWA AREA—GOVERNMENT POSITION

Mr. Erik Nielsen (Yukon): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the Acting Prime Minister. In April of 1973 I directed a number of questions to the government. One of them was whether the government had considered or developed a scheme under the Defence Research Board, Shirley's Bay, to utilize the central telephone system in Ottawa to keep under surveillance all telephones in the Ottawa area. If that was not happening, I would have expected a direct negative answer from the Prime Minister. But his response was: "It is not considered in the public interest for reasons of national security to disclose the details of intelligence activities."

In the light of recent events, particularly those of yesterday, will the Acting Prime Minister tell us whether or not the Shirley's Bay establishment has the capability of utilizing the central telephone system in Ottawa to keep under surveillance telephones in the Ottawa area and, if it has that capability, whether it is being so used?

● (1442)

[Translation]

Hon. Jean Chrétien (Acting Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, I am not particularly aware of this problem, but I will check and report to the hon. member. I do not think I am in a position to add anything to the answer given by the Prime Minister a few months ago, but I will check and if there is anything new about it, I will report to the hon. member.

[English]

POSSIBLE MONITORING OF MEMBERS' LONG DISTANCE TELEPHONE CALLS

Mr. Erik Nielsen (Yukon): Mr. Speaker, can the Acting Prime Minister inform the members of this House whether telephone calls, particularly long distance telephone calls, of members of this House were in any way monitored? Are there tapes being made of the conversations, particularly long distance telephone conversations of members? Does this capability to monitor and tape exist?

[Translation]

Hon. Jean Chrétien (Acting Prime Minister): The answer is no, Mr. Speaker, because I do not think it is in our interest to do that. In a letter addressed to the Leader of the Opposition, the Prime Minister has made it clear that the government had never allowed anyone to monitor telephone calls or keep the Parliament Hill offices of hon. members under surveillance.