

Access to Information

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ethier): That could be granted with unanimous consent. Is it agreed?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

Mr. Robinson (Burnaby): I will be brief, Mr. Speaker. The present commissioner of the RCMP said that he could not understand why policemen should not have access to all information gathered by the government. He said that this was because both the government and the police have the best interests of the citizens at heart. Mr. Simmonds said he could not understand why it was wrong for policemen to get information from government computer banks. He said, "It makes absolutely no sense to me, especially when all these data banks are put together at taxpayers' expense". Well, the commissioner of the RCMP will be happy today with the passage of this so-called privacy act. He will have his way because this bill does nothing less than provide carte blanche access for members of the RCMP security service and the civilian security service, and all, of course, in the best interests of the nation.

As I have said, to suggest that since the bill was called a privacy bill it is protecting their privacy constitutes nothing less than a gigantic con and a hoax on the people of Canada.

There are other weaknesses in this legislation. For example, the provision which denies access to the salaries of many of the most senior appointees of the Government of Canada. If we want to know the salary of Mitchell Sharp, the northern pipeline commissioner, do you think, Mr. Speaker, we will have access to that information under the privacy legislation? Of course not. I proposed an amendment which would have made it public but it was defeated.

● (1630)

As well, we see that there is a sweeping provision which grants access for any purpose whatsoever when, in the opinion of the head of the government institution, disclosure in the public interest clearly outweighs any invasion of privacy which could result from the disclosure. That is a purely subjective test. In other words, whenever disclosure in the public interest, whatever that may be, in the opinion of the head of the government institution outweighs the invasion of privacy, that is the end of the matter. Confidential information, whether medical records, taxation records or personal financial records, will all be made available to members of the public or, indeed, to members of the security service.

There are a number of other weaknesses in the privacy section. For example, the increasingly important question of trans-border data flow has not been addressed. Once personal, very confidential, private information crosses the Canadian border, as it does frequently, and goes into data banks in the United States, there is absolutely no control over the use of that information.

As well, the issue of the abuse of social insurance numbers has been totally ignored by this bill. I am pleased to say that we will certainly be supporting amendments to this bill which would include reference to the social insurance number abuse.

In closing, I say again that this government should not be allowed to perpetrate this kind of hoax on Canadians at a time when, perhaps more than ever, Canadians should be granted access to information and should be given a genuine freedom of information bill. At a time when there should be strong and effective protection of the private lives of Canadians, a bill has been presented to Parliament which is an illusion. This government will no doubt be travelling coast to coast, waving copies of the legislation, proclaiming that nirvana has arrived and that Canadians now have a strong and effective freedom of information bill, and that their privacy is being enhanced. We in this party do not intend to take part in that fraud. We do not intend to support a bill which does not enact genuine freedom of information legislation and genuine protection of privacy. I say in closing that that will only be the case when we form a government after the next election.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Robinson (Burnaby): Only then will we have genuine freedom of information legislation and legislation which will really protect the privacy of Canadians on the books. Not until that day will we see that legislation because we know, and it is very clear, that Bill C-43 was patterned after Bill C-15 and that many of the weaknesses in Bill C-15 were contained in Bill C-43. So naturally, the hon. member for Nepean-Carleton has a certain proprietary interest in Bill C-43. We know as well that the privacy act was largely modelled after the bill of the hon. member for Wellington-Dufferin-Simcoe (Mr. Beatty), an hon. member for whom I have a great deal of respect but who was unfortunately taken in by the siren song of the RCMP security service. We certainly do not intend to emulate that bill.

I say again that, on a day which should have been a proud day for Canadians, we must only express our sadness and disappointment that the kind of effective legislation which should have been brought before Parliament is indeed not being voted on today.

Hon. Bud Cullen (Sarnia-Lambton): Mr. Speaker, I think one can see, from the words of the hon. member, why we almost did not have an access to information bill at all. His is typical of the approach which was taken throughout the committee hearings—that if we do not get it our way we will delay and delay; we will cross t's and dot i's and then, at the last minute, have the gall to come before the committee and say, "If you adopt our procedure, if you will do it all in ten hours, if you will deal with all our amendments, then we are prepared to let this bill go ahead."

I frankly do not blame the opposition for saying, at that particular stage, "We are sorry, but we will not play that particular game. We will debate this bill as it should have been debated, but we will not participate in the game-playing which is going on here". Hour after hour of the time of the committee was taken up with much discussion and many questions