Statistics Act Amendment

context with a complete, in-depth review of Statistics Canada, particularly since questions as to its credibility have been raised in other forums, in fact by questions in this House and in the media.

The time has come to get at the job and encourage the President of the Treasury Board to act quickly to have these consultants appointed, and hopefully to bring these matters before a committee. I dearly hope that takes place and that the evil which this bill is intended to correct will be addressed by such a committee. It is clearly an important issue.

I congratulate the hon. member for bringing this before us. It gives us an opportunity to talk about it. This has been a useful exercise. I hope the initiative he has taken will result in the law being approved.

Mr. Ian Waddell (Vancouver-Kingsway): Mr. Speaker, I enjoy, both in this Parliament and outside it, listening to the hon. member for Saint-Henri-Westmount (Mr. Johnston), that poverty-stricken riding in eastern Canada. He seems to want it both ways, as I understand his colleagues do, which is to say that the bill is good but he wants to talk it out. It reminds me of the people in B.C. that we refer to as having their mugs on one side of the fence and their wumps on the other. We call that mugwumpery. I gather in eastern Canada it is called the radical middle.

We in the New Democratic Party are prepared not to have this bill talked out today. Therefore I will not speak very long. Second, we want it to go to committee where, as the hon. member for Saint-Henri-Westmount said, we can look at some of the questions that arise and hear some of the views on the other side from Statistics Canada. We have to examine some of the real details. I might say I agreed with most of the remarks set out rather succinctly and precisely by my corporate friend from Saint-Henri-Westmount.

I wish to address some remarks to my friend smiling over there, with his natty suit, as always, the hon. member for Fraser Valley West (Mr. Wenman). In my view, he made a good speech, but occasionally he sort of cheapened it by certain phrases. I see the member nodding. Let me give a couple of examples. The member said, "I agree with the view that a government that is big enough to give you everything you want is also a government that is big enough to take everything you have". Those are buzz words, big government. What does that do? We have big government. We have to recognize that. In my view, it does not mean very much.

Just before that the hon. member said, and I agree, "I can appreciate the desire of the government to have all possible information at its disposal in order to ensure that its decisions are empirically grounded. However, when you weigh that limitless knowledge against the equally total destruction of an individual's personal privacy and integrity, the price becomes too high." That is well put.

Later the member went on to say, "My own feeling, Mr. Speaker, is that in the hands of government, to paraphrase Lord Acton, information corrupts and absolute information corrupts absolutely." What does that mean? We need infor-

mation. Is it really corrupting? It is only corrupting in the way that it is used. The hon. member puts his argument and takes it away from a good logical approach with a sort of social credit approach. I did not mean to slight my friends from the Creditistes. I mean a British Columbia social credit approach.

What we need is a balanced view here. Statistics Canada and government officials indeed have a right to get information from the public. They have a right to know what kind of population we have. They need information for all sorts of reasons. For example, they need to corroborate what our social scientists are studying, to analyse trends and so on. They need the information to put forward new government policies. They need it for some of the reasons my friend from Fraser Valley West said. We have to state that and state it categorically. Given the fact that they need the information, it is no doubt there can be and have been abuses.

I have looked at the census. When I was a young man I was paid to go around and collect census data. This has changed over the years. There are now many more questions and they are more detailed. Many of the questions are open to abuse. The hon. member gave a good example about a woman involved in a divorce matter. That is a great example of where there can be abuses.

● (1740)

It seems to me, first of all, that Statistics Canada may not need as much information as they ask for. We can look at that point in committee and determine how much they really do need. Second, it seems to me that they are asking some unnecessary questions. That, in itself, is an abuse which takes up the time of the householder. Perhaps we should consider this aspect further. One question that was always a problem when I was asking questions—and it apparently is still a problem—is: who is the head of the household? What is the mother tongue of the household when you have an English mother and a French father? How does one determine the answer to the question? These are matters which the committee should consider.

The third problem, one which has only come to light recently, involves the leaking of information. In other words, we cannot really trust a lot of the people who get the information; we cannot trust the government with the information. The answer to this difficulty may lie not just in changing the questions you ask, but to make sure there are no leaks of information. You make sure that the information really is kept confidential. It may be necessary to prosecute the deputy minister, or even the minister, if the information goes astray. That is a way of approaching the problem, although I do not see us adopting that approach.

The point I raise is that the information could get lost and could be leaked. I think of income tax data, for example, or medical records. The Krever commission is looking into this. They have evidence of medical records being in the hands of the RCMP. It is not right and proper, and it is very dangerous. This is what we understand as Big Brother. Perhaps it is a