

Security Intelligence Service

diplomats in Ottawa, one of which unfortunately did succeed, as everyone will recall.

According to Senator Arthur J. Golberg, former U.S. Supreme Court Justice, the threat of modern terrorism goes beyond national boundaries and the interests of sovereign states. He goes even further by stating the following:

This outbreak of threats and sacrifices in human lives jeopardizes both the growth and the operation of our system of international law. Indeed, modern terrorism, which now has at its disposal highly sophisticated technological means and may one day have access to biological and nuclear weapons, is a positive and real threat to the very existence of civilization.

The McDonald Commission has underlined the fact that modern terrorist groups are continuously improving their methods and have become real experts in the illicit pursuit of political objectives through violent means. This is why the Commission has laid so much emphasis on the need to collect factual information long before the evidence required to lay charges can be obtained, in other words, before acts of violence are committed and the police forces concerned are called in. Bill C-9 takes this fact into account and provides for an effective mechanism to counter the terrorist threat which is on the rise, even in Canada.

Before closing, I would like to mention another aspect of the debate on security intelligence which is the urgency of passing legislation. The Bill introduced in the House provides for the tools which will allow us to fight effectively against the ever increasing threats against Canada's security, including the two provisions which I briefly explained earlier. We must act now. The world of espionage, terrorism and subversion is not a static one; it evolves and gets more proficient even now as we are discussing the problems it creates and the methods by which we could protect ourselves against its attacks. This is why, Mr. Speaker, the Special Senate Committee stresses in its report the extreme urgency of passing security legislation. In doing so, it has joined the increasing number of security intelligence experts and enlightened observers who are urging us to pass legislation and pressing us to safeguard the interests of our country in the area of security. Bill C-9 meets this very vital need. Furthermore, it does so in a way designed to ensure at the same time complete respect and protection under the law of the basic rights and freedoms of all Canadians.

Mr. Speaker, I will say that it is obvious and generally admitted by all those who criticized former Bill C-157 that Bill C-9 is an extremely innovative measure, a very good piece of legislation and something which should not be criticized or questioned on grounds which, in some cases, might have been valid under the old formula, but which no longer stand.

Hopefully, the Opposition will aim its critics at suggesting other improvements. However, I would remind the House that Bill C-9 as reworded meets all the major concerns.

● (1540)

[English]

Mr. Robinson (Burnaby): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the Member who just spoke a question with respect to his defence of this legislation as being a significant improvement over the previous Bill, and in particular a response to the recommendations of the Pitfield committee. The Pitfield committee strongly recommended that the security service oversight body, the Security Intelligence Review Committee, and the Inspector General, should have full access to all documents in the possession of the security service itself. Despite that strong recommendation, the Government, in Bill C-9, has refused to accept that recommendation. We are left with the incredible provision that even though the security service has access to certain broadly defined Cabinet documents, the body which is responsible in the legislation for their overview is denied access to those same documents. How can the Parliamentary Secretary defend that particular provision of the Bill and the decision of the Government to ignore that fundamental recommendation of the Pitfield committee?

[Translation]

Mr. Tardif: Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned earlier in my statement, Bill C-157 received a number of amendments, I even said earlier there were some 40 of them. Clearly, if we use the previous wording to focus on a specific situation, one may find oneself with an unsatisfactory answer. However, I would suggest to the Hon. Member for Burnaby (Mr. Robinson) that looking at the new version, Bill C-9, we find a significant number of provisions through which all security measures are made much more flexible, open and consultative.

[English]

Mr. Robinson (Burnaby): Mr. Speaker, perhaps the Parliamentary Secretary might now wish to answer the question. The specific question was; why was the Pitfield committee's fundamental recommendation that the overview committee should have access to all documents in the possession of the security service, including Cabinet documents, rejected?

[Translation]

Mr. Tardif: The answer is quite simple, Mr. Speaker. The Government did not deem fit to act on that.

[English]

Mr. Robinson (Burnaby): Mr. Speaker, I have another question in another area. Under the provisions of this legislation the new civilian security service would be entitled to exchange information which it obtained through the use of its intrusive techniques with secret security agencies of other countries. Given the fact that the new security agency will have sweeping access to a whole series of confidential information about Canadians, is the Government prepared to indicate precisely with which agencies of foreign countries it is going to be sharing this information?