

Supply

These issues can and will be examined by the subcommittee on national security. While we have similar concerns as the Bloc about the political make-up of SIRC, the make-up of the subcommittee does reflect the current Parliament. It is the subcommittee on national security that should first deal with these issues of classifying information, of handling high security documents and of reviewing the Official Secrets Act.

• (1105)

If the subcommittee cannot resolve these issues in this House then another royal commission into Canada's security intelligence service would be warranted.

First this House must make every effort to get to the bottom of this to avert the additional cost to the Canadian taxpayers of a royal commission. We have the vehicles in place. We have CSIS doing an internal investigation. We have SIRC doing a watchdog report and we have the national security subcommittee to investigate it.

What we do need is to have the will to be fully accountable to the Canadian people, for only in being fully accountable will we maintain the support and the confidence of the Canadian people in the job that we are trying to do.

Hon. Herb Gray (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Solicitor General of Canada): Madam Speaker, there are problems, to say the least, with the Bloc's motion.

One of these problems has been identified by the Bloc itself when the proposer of the motion conceded there was the unfortunate absence in it of a key word, allegation. The motion originally spoke about illegal activities of CSIS as if it had been proven that such activities had in fact occurred.

As I have said in this House and outside the House the many allegations made recently about CSIS activities are so far just that, allegations. By the way, it is important to stress that these allegations relate to a period well before this government took office and before I assumed the responsibilities of Solicitor General.

To conclude that CSIS acted illegally requires analysis and conclusions based on solid evidence, that is based on definite facts, related to the legal framework created by this Parliament for the operations of CSIS and other relevant laws as well.

That is why I believe that Canadians should await the conclusion of the work, the investigation of the Security Intelligence Review Committee, into what I repeat are so far only allegations.

The requirement for the creation of the Security Intelligence Review Committee, SIRC, when Parliament passed the legislation creating the Canadian Security Intelligence Service in 1984 was designed to provide Parliament, Canadians generally and

the Solicitor General with an independent review of CSIS activities.

This body has over the years provided important insight and analysis for ministers, Parliament and the public regarding the operations of CSIS and has made recommendations to ensure that CSIS continues to operate as Parliament intended when it adopted the CSIS act.

A reading of successive SIRC reports over the years, and I am talking about reports available to the public, shows that the SIRC as a permanent body at arm's length both from CSIS and the government has found areas for improvement since CSIS was created over 10 years ago. It has also found reason to confirm the value of the work of CSIS in the interests of all Canadians.

• (1110)

The point is that the SIRC was created exactly for the task that the Official Opposition in its motion says we need a royal commission to perform.

The SIRC exists to provide the review of all CSIS duties and functions. More specifically, under section 54 of the act the SIRC can investigate any matter that relates to the performance by CSIS of its duties and functions, and then provide the Solicitor General with a special report of this investigation.

A review of any such matter and the production of a special report is precisely what the SIRC has undertaken to do in response to the recent allegations. It has also stated that it intends to have a report as soon as possible. It has said that it intends to have a report available, in other words in the coming month of October.

SIRC has built up a body of expertise and experience that I think will prove extremely valuable to this present investigation.

The Official Opposition in its motion calls for the creation of a royal commission. What is a royal commission? It is an individual or a group of individuals independent of government, appointed by order in council, that is by the cabinet, with wide powers to look into a matter or matters of public concern.

The Security Intelligence Review Committee is a body of individuals appointed by order in council, by the cabinet, under the CSIS legislation to look into and report on an important matter or matters involving the activities of CSIS.

Like an ordinary royal commission it is independent of government. It is independent and at arm's length from CSIS and the minister. It has wide powers to carry out its mandate. That is why I say that in my view it is in effect like a permanent royal commission with the mandate of keeping under review the activities of CSIS and carrying out special inquiries into these activities, either of its own accord or at the request of the minister.