

Routine Proceedings

Mr. Kaplan: Derek Burney is doing a good job in Washington. He is a competent person to be down there.

Bruce Phillips played a highly partisan role in the Prime Minister's office in the last election campaign, to put it mildly. Someone had to do it. I am not saying that there is anything wrong with doing that. People do it. We have partisan people on our side, you have partisan people on your side.

The insult to the office of the Privacy Commissioner and the insult to Parliament is to take that individual and appoint him to a position where he now has to be a watchdog on the government, a watchdog on his pal for whom he fought so hard and in such a partisan way to keep in the office of Prime Minister of this country. That is what is unacceptable.

I cannot believe that the Minister of Justice does not recognize that. I am confident that the Minister of Justice wishes she had a better case to put forward than the case that this individual should now become an officer of Parliament, to stand up as a watchdog against abuses by the government of the very important achievement that we have in this country in our strict rules of privacy.

The Privacy Act, a very important and progressive piece of legislation in this country, is meant to ensure that the government does not abuse the privacy of individuals.

We know governments collect more and more information on individuals. The government knows about every person in this country through records that are part of the public domain, whether they have been seeing a psychiatrist, whether they have ever had venereal disease, whether they have ever had an abortion, whether they have ever been charged with any offence, acquitted or convicted. There is a lot of information out there.

As the computer age has progressed, governments have come to know more and more. However, we have developed a wise policy, as expressed in our Privacy Act and other acts, which is designed to make sure that all of this information against every one of us is not used by government or by others to abuse those individuals. To put it in a sentence, the law requires that information which is obtained by the government or which comes to the government for one purpose cannot be used, even by the government, for another purpose. It is the high

calling of the officer of Parliament who is the Privacy Commissioner to ensure that no such abuse occurs.

• (1550)

I think that our Prime Minister could have come up with an individual more at arm's length from the success or failure of himself, from the hurly-burly of politics and of the government than Bruce Phillips.

I know the government could have come up with a half a dozen or a dozen people who would have been acceptable to us on this side of the House. The government did not try. As much as I respect Bruce Phillips, what is needed for this job is a person who will not be identified with the political success of the government and of the Prime Minister to the extent that Bruce Phillips is.

St. Francis Xavier University is not the largest university in the country. I know the Prime Minister favours its graduates. Even if he had just looked at graduates of St. Francis Xavier University, he could have found some among that number who would not have been so intimately identified and so committed to the personal success of the Prime Minister in his political life and to the success of the government, who could certainly have done the job just as well.

The Privacy Act is meant to provide individuals with access to their personal information held by the federal government. It protects their privacy by limiting those who can see that information and it gives individuals some control over the government's collection and use of the information.

I do not want the House to misunderstand what I am saying about Bruce Phillips. I am not suggesting that we will have an individual in Bruce Phillips who will deliver personal information about individuals to the Prime Minister for political use. I am not suggesting that he will do that. I take him to be a man of integrity. The problem is that he will have access to all that information. He will know and he will be able to find out personal information about every political enemy of the Prime Minister in this country, of every political adversary.

Mr. Crosby: Give us some examples.

Mr. Kaplan: Examples are not hard to draw. I am not going to give examples. But the Privacy Commissioner is in a position to have the most intimate details about the life of every Canadian, those in public life, their families,