

Supply—Public Archives

Mr. Knight: I thought it was the library item which had been called.

Mr. Herridge: I should just like to express the appreciation of the members of this group for the courtesy and co-operation of the archivist and his staff. Many of us here are, somewhat like the minister, interested in history. We have not the capacity to deal with history that he has, but we take an amateur's interest. On that account we often seek information from the public archives, and we have found the archivist and his staff most co-operative and most willing to put themselves out to make searches and try to provide material that is required. I thought that before the item passed someone should express our appreciation of that service.

Mr. Hamilton (Notre Dame de Grace): Mr. Chairman, I should like to say just a word very largely in support of that which was said by the hon. member for Kootenay West. I also on occasion have received very considerable co-operation from the national archivist. I should point out to the minister that, because of the plans for new buildings which would include the archives, I think more consideration might be given to more extensive use of the microfilming process as opposed to straight storage of documents. In discussions with the department it has been indicated to me that they feel it is cheaper to store documents on occasion than it is actually to microfilm. My experience has been—and all the information I have been able to obtain also has been—that in almost every case over an extensive period of time the storage of documents is a more costly process than microfilming.

I can envisage a situation arising in the next 20 years or so in which, if we follow the procedure of storing documents, rather than microfilming, we shall have packed the new building to the rafters and have to start all over again building more buildings. That matter should be taken into serious consideration looking well ahead into the future. I would also be interested if the minister is in a position to state whether he has any information, in addition to what I have said, as to microfilming versus the storage of documents.

Mr. Pickersgill: Mr. Chairman, of course, as I know the hon. member would agree, there are certain types of documents one would never want to destroy because they have great historical value. But, speaking generally, I think we are storing far too much paper here in Ottawa and building far too much space to store more paper, and I heartily agree with what the hon. member for Notre Dame de Grace pointed out with

regard to microfilming. There are some documents that are not even worth microfilming. There are many that ought to be used for fuel because they have no continuing value. There are a great many others that can be kept in a very small space with microfilming and the originals destroyed with large savings, in my opinion, to the public treasury. We hope that, when the public records building at Tunney's pasture is completed in October—as we hope it will be—this microfilming program which has been under way for some years will be greatly accelerated. I thank the hon. member for Notre Dame de Grace for drawing attention to this matter.

Mr. Hamilton (Notre Dame de Grace): One more question, Mr. Chairman. What provision, if any, has the government made for protection of valuable documents in the event of an all-out war? In various countries of the world, in a realization of the destruction which would result from any war, provision has been made well outside the populated centres for underground storage facilities. One example of that is about 100 miles outside Washington, and there is another in Europe, where they have utilized a series of underground caves. It would seem to me that the government has in its possession in the archives now documents which, as the minister has suggested, are quite irreplaceable, and I am wondering what consideration has been given to protecting these documents if and when the need should arise.

Mr. Pickersgill: There is one thing I happen to know about personally. When I was clerk of the privy council we felt that the orders in council passed since confederation should be protected by having a set of microfilms as well as the original orders. I believe that work is virtually completed. It is being done on a current basis and the originals and the microfilms are kept in different places. That does not quite meet the hon. member's point. I may say that I am advised his point has been under consideration by my colleague who is in charge of civil defence. I think there is a great deal in what the hon. gentleman says. Reproduction can be done with microfilm very cheaply, and we should do everything we can to see that valuable records or at least reproductions of them continue to exist.

Item agreed to.

National library—

344. General administration, \$119,097.

Mr. Knight: Is the minister going to make a statement on this item?