

Archives of Canada

to be done. The Privacy Act applies to a greater number of Government institutions than the traditional number covered by the Financial Administration Act. These additional 50-plus institutions were, and continue to be, unfamiliar with government records management practices and the roles and responsibilities of the public Archives.

With the passage of the Privacy Act legislation, the Archives has been actively advising government institutions on the scheduling of personal information. The process of the scheduling of information was in place before the proclamation of the Privacy Act.

I see you indicating that I have just a few more minutes left, Mr. Speaker. I would like to be able to deal with Ministerial records and with Article II. I would also like to be able to address the microfilm unit which has now been done away with. I think that was a grave error of judgment and I hope it will be reinstated. As well, I would like to bring to the Minister's attention my suggestion with regard to archival communities. There has been a very serious error in allocation of funds, an error that could potentially impact on the goal we all have in mind for the Archives.

Archives are the apex of the pyramid from which all historical information flows. The modern state is the custodian of enormous quantities of information, and the expanding scope of its utilization is one of the strongest forces shaping society and protecting our identity. The archives that result are a source of understanding, like mirrors reflecting our past. The greatest possible openness in Government and in the archives of Government will ensure that the history that is written will be an accurate reflection of Canada's past. It is appropriate to recall Lord Acton's oft-quoted admonition: "To keep one's archives banned against historians is tantamount to leaving one's history to one's enemies". It is said that the archives are the soul of a nation. Our archives constitute a priceless heritage. We must protect them while there is still time.

In conclusion, in light of the rapidly changing information age of our world, we welcome the Government's action to bring in Bill C-95 as part of the review and updating of Canadian cultural policy. We see the Archives as key to the conservation, maintenance, enhancement and appreciation of our distinct Canadian heritage. We hope the Government will agree to amending the tight and restrictive areas I noted in the Bill, concerns over which were expressed by the very constituencies who use this fine Government service. We look forward to participating in a co-operative undertaking to facilitate the necessary amendments during hearings in committee and to enable passage of a revised and more accessible Archives of Canada Act.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Lynn McDonald (Broadview—Greenwood): Mr. Speaker, why are archives important for a society and, more specifically, why are Canada's archives important for Canadian society? In fact, the archives are the repository of the documentation used to write history. The archives are the basis on which we build self-knowledge, our political process, our economic and social life, in other words, sociology and the history of our society.

The present Archives Act was passed in 1912. Archivists, historians, sociologists, anthropologists and economists have been waiting for a reform and an updating of this Act for a long time. Since its passage in 1912, we have witnessed the arrival of computers and other electronic data preservation means. In addition, the quantity of documents to be preserved has increased enormously. The workload of the archives has become heavier. In the meantime, the curiosity of Canadians about their society and their desire for self-knowledge has not decreased.

[*English*]

We have before us a Bill which proposes the first significant law on the subject. Bill C-95, of course, addresses a matter that is extremely important to anyone who is concerned about the culture, history and sociology of our country. I will argue shortly that this proposed law is deficient in a number of areas and that it risks the suppression of some important historical documents.

● (1420)

In order to make my argument I will digress a little into the history of archives, into how important they have been, and into what function they serve. If we go back in eastern and western history to ancient Greece and ancient China, we see that historical records and archives have been in existence for a long time. Records go back to 1300 BC in China in some form, although mostly for ritual purposes. By the time of Confucius there was a change, and records were being used for ethical purposes—to award praise or blame. Writing the history of something then became a way of making rulers accountable for their actions. Of course this is extremely important in a time of tyranny. People themselves might not be able to react to the tyranny but the historical record would contain it. Therefore rulers had to be accountable and knew they would face the judgment of posterity.

It is not surprising that the preservation of records should become a state function, and that states would want to guard the ability to decide what would survive of their political history and other issues on which they might be judged. The keeping of records became a matter for severe penalties. For example, in a period of recession in China in the 3rd century BC, a decree was issued that all histories except those by imperial historians should be burned. People had to turn in their banned books on pain of death.

In the West we have an understanding of human nature which made it possible for people to develop the ideas that historical records could help us to decide what we should and should not be doing, that we could learn from the past, and that we could help make the future better. The notion that records of the past could be used to prevent mistakes from recurring is very well articulated by the time of Polybius. Accurate preservation and accurate recording became a matter of practical importance. It was not just an intellectual hobby; it was something which might even save society in time of great need.