

Oral Questions

with the deciphering instructions, and since these alarming facts have been known to the government for some time, I should like to know when the government intends to do something about the situation?

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

[Translation]

Hon. Gérard Pelletier (Minister of Communications): Mr. Speaker, first I want to say that I cannot admit the allegations of the hon. member who spoke previously because, in the opinion of all Canadian experts, who have dealt with this matter in an official report published under the title *Privacy and Computers*, there is no reason in Canada for alarm or panic as the hon. member seems ready for. As for the measures to be taken at present, this is quite a complex action. I can simply say that the government was certainly not negligent in this matter as it is generally recognized that Canada is more advanced in the formulation of a total security plan concerning computers than most other countries in the world, with one exception.

[English]

Mr. Lawrence: In view of the fact that on December 7, 1972 a joint statement by the minister and the Minister of Justice of that day indicated very serious concern about security leaks and the whole field of computerized data retrieval leaks and that right then the government was working on several measures to plug these security gaps, what has happened to the task force report and the very specific recommendations that the minister himself said he would be adopting immediately in respect of those matters?

[Translation]

Mr. Pelletier (Hochelaga): Certainly, Mr. Speaker, the answer is simple: The work went on. There are 21 groups now working under the direction of a secretariat of the Department of Communications under Dr. Von Naeyer. The activity continues. New measures are taken daily and this work is not a task that can be performed in a few months. Work has started, it is underway and will be finished soon.

As to the legal aspect, the hon. member could ask the Minister of Justice who will introduce a bill covering this matter among others.

[English]

POSSIBILITY OF LEGISLATION TO PERMIT ACCESS BY
INDIVIDUALS TO STORED DATA TO CHECK ACCURACY AND
TO PROTECT CONFIDENTIALITY

Mr. Bill Knight (Assiniboia): Mr. Speaker, my supplementary question is directed to the Minister of Communications. In view of the fact that many nations of the world whose government services store information in computer data centres have passed legislation to protect the rights of individuals in terms of this information, would the minister inform the House whether he is going to introduce legislation to allow individuals to see files kept on them in order to determine whether they are accurate, and to protect the confidentiality of that information so

[Mr. Lawrence.]

that corporations cannot use it in their own private business interests?

Hon. Gérard Pelletier (Minister of Communications): Mr. Speaker, I understand that this is the general intent of a bill that will be brought forward by the Minister of Justice. I suppose the hon. member will have to wait until the bill is tabled to know exactly in what fashion these objectives will be implemented.

ACTION TO PROTECT PRIVACY IN LIGHT OF SHOWING OF
COMPUTER PRINT-OUTS BY OTTAWA TELEVISION STATION

Mr. Erik Nielsen (Yukon): Mr. Speaker, my supplementary question is for the Prime Minister. In view of the statement of the Minister of Communications that we have nothing to be alarmed about, and in view of the fact that last night an Ottawa television station showed over public television copies of confidential computer print-outs on unemployment insurance claimants for the Atlantic region, thus illustrating the ease with which information can be taken out of computer data banks, would the Prime Minister take immediate steps to stop this invasion of privacy?

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, I must confess that I was not aware of this particular television program or of the invasion of privacy which is alleged. I will look into the matter but my reaction is inclined to be the same as the minister's, that I would not panic until I knew more about it.

Mr. Speaker: The Chair will recognize the hon. member for Yukon on a supplementary and then go to the second question. I appreciate that there may be further supplementaries later, and we can come back to this question. The Chair will recognize the hon. member for Yukon and then the hon. member for Nanaimo-Cowichan-The Islands.

Mr. Nielsen: Mr. Speaker, in view of the television program last night I am afraid I am not lulled by the Prime Minister's assurance that there is nothing to panic about. According to reports by the same television station, pay cheques by the Department of Supply and Services normally issued by computer were delayed for one day by outside interference. In view of that fact, will the Prime Minister now issue a specific order to protect access to government computers when no such protection, obviously, currently exists?

● (1430)

Mr. Trudeau: Mr. Speaker, I can only repeat that I am not aware of this practice and I will look into it. I still do not think I should panic about it. I remember the hon. member alleging a couple of years ago that there were listening devices on telephones and he was not able to substantiate that. I am glad I did not panic at that time.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Nielsen: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a question of personal privilege.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!