

*Archives of Canada*

● (1520)

**Mr. Lesick:** Mr. Speaker, I thank the Hon. Member for her question since it is a relevant one. It is the duty of people to collect all materials that they possibly can in concert with the archivists and officials at the seven offices in the country. In this way they can determine what is important. There are also provincial archives and provincial historical societies which look over materials to see what is relevant and what is not. I suggest that most important is the fact that there is a collection. We are making an effort to understand where we come from and how we managed 50, 60, 100 years ago and more.

What is relevant? Whatever is good is relevant. Archivists can tell us, but it is something which has to go back to the people since if it is relevant to the people, it is more important.

**Mr. David Berger (Laurier):** Mr. Speaker, it is also my pleasure to participate in the debate this afternoon. The Public Archives is not something on which we place too much importance when we are here in the House of Commons. When we are here we are more concerned about getting things done today and tomorrow. There is perhaps the odd Member of Parliament who is concerned about preserving the record of his or her actions for future generations.

There are a number of interesting questions which come up when one starts to think about the Archives and the importance it has in our history. A year or two ago I was invited to the opening of an exhibition of a private collection which had been donated by a Canadian citizen to the Public Archives. As I recall, it was the collection of Mr. Jacob Lowe. It is a collection of Judaic art which Mr. Lowe had collected throughout his lifetime in his travels throughout Europe and the rest of the world. After the holocaust he rummaged around in antique shops and in destroyed synagogues buying objects from art collectors and private individuals. He put together a collection which is really remarkable. It is a unique collection in the world. There is probably no other private collection which parallels or comes anywhere close to the collection put together by this one individual. He decided to donate his collection to the Archives. His donation was accepted and has now become part of the historical record concerning the heritage of our country. In reflecting upon this Bill I was reminded of the exhibition and the collection of Mr. Lowe.

The question which came to my mind was with respect to the criteria used by the Archives in deciding whether or not to accept the collection of a private individual for inclusion in the Public Archives. Undoubtedly, there are all kinds of people who would like to see their records placed in the national Archives. I am sure that what the Archives accepts is probably only a small percentage of what is offered. Undoubtedly there are historical standards, probably even international ones. Undoubtedly there are conferences held to determine what constitutes a matter or an item for inclusion in the Archives. Nonetheless, perhaps it is a question which we could ask during the consideration of this Bill in the legislative committee. It would seem appropriate to include several of these

considerations or criteria in the Bill to establish the Archives of Canada. Perhaps there is even something in the Schedule. I have looked through the Bill and I have not been able to find anything in that regard at this point.

I understand that when a private collection is given to the Archives there may be some tax considerations which the individual making the contribution may receive in terms of a tax benefit from the Government. Perhaps those aspects are covered in the Income Tax Act. Again, perhaps it would be appropriate to ask questions of this nature during the deliberations of the Bill in committee.

We know that the Bill will replace the present Public Archives Act which dates back to 1912. We know that the legislation before us follows the recommendations made by at least two recent reports, one by a consultative group on Canadian archives, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, and the other by the Applebaum-Hébert Federal Cultural Policy Review Committee. The Public Archives of Canada is to become the Archives of Canada.

Looking through the Bill we see that it is much more detailed than the present legislation. In addition to acquiring records, the object and functions of the Archives as outlined in Clause 4 of the Bill set out more modern concerns such as providing access to records, providing information, consultation, research and other services related to the Archives. Also as part of the objects of the Archives we find a clause dealing with the ability or the power that is given to the Archives to make information known about the Archives by such means as publications, exhibitions and the lending of records. Much of this legislation will simply implement many of the things that the Archives is doing today but which were obviously not foreseen in 1912 when the original legislation was passed.

We in this Party have concerns, some of which were expressed by my colleague, the Hon. Member for Mount Royal (Mrs. Finestone), earlier this afternoon. I would also like to address myself to some of these concerns. I was happy to hear the Parliamentary Secretary state earlier that the Government and Government Members are disposed to having a careful study of this legislation in committee with public hearings. Certainly Members of Parliament are not familiar with all of the arcane aspects of every Bill that comes before the House. We have to rely on people from the private sector or even Government experts in this matter. Certainly the experts should be given the opportunity to come before a parliamentary committee to express their views.

● (1530)

We have a particular concern with Clause 5 which deals with the records of Government institutions and ministerial records.

[Translation]

Earlier I heard the Minister of Communications (Mr. Masse) say that the Bill prohibits "the destruction of government and ministerial records, except in certain cases".