

statistical agency. We can only inspire confidence if we do not appear to be resorting to compulsion. Let us not insult the intelligence of Canadians. In the end we are only undermining the foundations of the parliamentary system if we deny the responsibility, right and privilege of privacy to the people.

I would like to take this opportunity to point out a change in wording which I intend to introduce into my bill when it is in committee. As the wording currently reads, an individual is not required to answer even those questions pertaining to the topics I specified on page 2 of my bill. My intention is to make it compulsory to answer those questions specified, and I will suggest the amended wording in committee.

Mr. Donald J. Johnston (Saint-Henri-Westmount): Mr. Speaker, at the outset let me say that I appreciate the comments of the hon. member for Fraser Valley West (Mr. Wenman). In addition, I would like to offer my personal congratulations to him for taking the initiative in bringing this private member's bill before the House for discussion and consideration on a matter which, I think we will all agree, is of paramount importance.

● (1720)

He has expressed a fear of the "big brother" complex which he believes the existing legislation may help create here in Canada among Canadians; the invasion of privacy which he feels is inherent in the current state of the law. He raises a number of problems which I would like to touch upon, because I think they are real, not perceived. I will subsequently deal with whether the amendment which the hon. member proposes to the Statistics Act is the right way to go at this stage. I would like to re-emphasize that I believe the matter is important, and the member indeed deserves to be congratulated for taking this initiative.

First of all, the issue of personal information is a very real one. I think all of us are concerned that some of the surveys may be requesting information which is not really required for the objects of the act or for what the act should really deal with. That raises a variety of considerations, one of which is whether the Statistics Act in terms of its objects, in terms of its purpose, in terms of where it is supposed to take us, should not be amended in a more meaningful way to further define those objects, rather than unnecessarily changing the nature of the sanction imposed upon people to whom surveys are addressed. In other words, we have to examine the issue as to whether or not we are requesting information under that act which should not be requested at all.

Another point though which was quite striking in the member's comments has to do with the extent of the burden which apparently is being imposed on Canadians in responding to these extremely complicated, complex forms. I believe the hon. member mentioned that with respect to family expenditure information there were something like 21 subdivisions on house improvements alone, on which the act as it presently stands would appear to permit a questionnaire. Not only that, it requires the citizen to respond under pain of criminal prosecution.

Statistics Act Amendment

All of us would have to ask, is that not too much of a burden to impose upon our citizens? Going even further than that, I would guess that many Canadians today suspect that much of the information sought by Statistics Canada is probably irrelevant and much of it is probably never used for any useful purpose in any event. In other words, there may be drawersful of statistics and information located in Statistics Canada which is of no effective benefit and that maybe it is a make-work program within that department. We do not know, Mr. Speaker. I do not want to cast aspersions on Statistics Canada; all I am saying is that that is a question which I am sure comes to the minds of many Canadians as they are required to fill out these various surveys.

I might also say that I, like many other people in this House being a practising lawyer in the commercial area, have been appalled at the burden historically placed on many of our own clients with respect to information required from commercial operating firms. One does suspect that this information, while being put necessarily to a bad purpose, may not be put to any purpose at all. Hence, is this an expense, quite apart from the fact that it is a burden on the people, which the Canadian people should be expected to incur? Is there a risk in terms of invasion of privacy?

As I understand the proposed amendment, the hon. member for Fraser Valley West has sought to eliminate the punitive provisions of the act in so far as they apply to individual Canadians, except in the case of a very limited amount of information, being information pertaining to name, sex, marital status, mother tongue, birth or family relationship of members of the household.

In other words, as I understand the amendment, if a person gives false information or refuses to respond in those areas, and in those areas alone, then the law will apply as it did apply and the usual criminal proceedings or whatever can be levied against that individual.

On the other hand, he is amending section 29, which states that:

Every firm or corporation, and every person acting for or interested in a firm or corporation—

Which I presume would include a shareholder of the corporation, for example.

—without lawful excuse, (a) refuses or neglects to answer—

And so on. In that event, as I understand the amendment, the provisions of the law would continue to apply and criminal prosecution could ensue against such an individual in the event that he did not respond to a questionnaire. Of course, there we are dealing with persons interested in the firm or acting for the firm or corporation. In addition, as I understand it, we are talking about the firm or corporation itself to the extent that it can be fined and it will remain subject to the act. Corporations do not enjoy any further protection under this amendment nor do firms, which I also would presume would be what we in the province of Quebec regard as a sole proprietorship operating under a *raison sociale*. So that effectively in those instances those individuals could still be prosecuted. But with respect to