

Access to Information

Canadians who felt that the social insurance number was being abused.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Beatty: What those of us who talked to constituents about social insurance numbers have found is that there is a profound concern among Canadians about the potential abuses which can be made of them. We found concern about the threat to privacy, about infringement upon religious freedom that results from excessive use of social insurance numbers. Just this past week, Mr. Speaker, I had a call from a constituent, an old age pensioner, who said that when her pension cheque comes through, the government has so programmed its computers that it writes her name and address on the cheque, and because there is a see-through portion of the envelope, you can see the individual's social insurance number. That is how they respect the privacy of information. That is how they deal with senior citizens' social insurance numbers. They are visible from outside of the envelope.

The social insurance number is increasingly being used as a means of filing. Increasingly, both in the private sector and in the public sector, organizations are using the social insurance number as a way of filing information about individuals. To abuse social insurance numbers in this way, to give out an individual's confidential information, his social insurance number, is tantamount to having a row of houses each of which has the same lock on the front door, each of which has the one master key to open the door. It does not mean that if you changed the locks, it would be impossible to break into the house. What it does mean is that they all have the same key, they all use the same key, and once you get your hand on that key it makes it that easier to get into all of the houses. That is precisely the great danger that there is in abuse of the social insurance numbers. What the government is doing is to ignore that problem.

● (1700)

That is why I have moved a series of motions which would attempt to restore that portion of the bill which would restrict the use of the social insurance number and respect people's rights to privacy.

There has been an ominous development which I think should be of concern to Canadians. The government has said that even if we were to abolish the social insurance number, that would not guarantee privacy. That is absolutely right. No one has ever made the claim that invasions of privacy would go away if we were to do away with the social insurance number entirely. However, the real issue is whether the government should be encouraging the proliferation of single identifying numbers and their use in both the private and public sectors, considering the consequences it has for personal privacy.

One issue which has not been dealt with in the House of Commons which seems to have escaped public attention was an announcement by the Secretary of State (Mr. Regan) that he was spending \$15,000 to commission a survey of the acceptability of wallet-sized citizenship papers for Canadians.

If anyone has attended a citizenship ceremony for new Canadians, he or she would be aware that each new Canadian citizen is given a wallet-sized Canadian citizenship paper to carry around. Most Canadians do not realize this, but these are also available to Canadian citizens born in this country. I believe the cost to get one at the present time is \$8.

What information does it contain? First, it gives an individual's full name; second, it says he is a Canadian citizen; third, it includes a photograph of the individual; fourth, it gives any other names, if there are any others not included on the front; fifth, it gives the date of birth of the individual; sixth, it gives the individual's sex; and seventh, it gives the individual's height, weight and eye colour. According to the Secretary of State, each of these citizenship cards is individually numbered to make it discrete from others.

One's mind goes back to 1971 when the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) was questioned in Saskatoon. According to *The Globe and Mail* of October 25, 1971, under the headline "Use of ID cards forecast by PM":

Saskatoon—Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau yesterday indicated his personal belief that at some point in the future compulsory identity cards will be required by all Canadians.

"But I don't look forward to it, if for no other reason than the sheer mechanics involved in issuing and maintaining the cards. I hope we can retard the day as long as possible."

A system of compulsory personal identity cards would inevitably entail, he suggested, special powers for the police to permit them to stop people to check their identity. People would also inevitably be required to produce them whenever they checked into a hotel, applied for a job and so on.

For all these reasons, he said, he finds such an infringement of the personal rights of Canadians repulsive and would prefer to see individuals continue free to walk about unhampered by such a requirement.

The Prime Minister made his remarks on the eventual need for the cards at a student question-and-answer period on the campus of the University of Saskatchewan. A student had asked Mr. Trudeau for his personal views on the desirability and necessity of such a system.

The Prime Minister did not expand on why he felt ID cards would be required by Canadians in the future.

The government will respond by saying that these ID cards are voluntary, that there is nothing mandatory about them and that we need not produce them as identification if we are going to cash cheques, if we are going to check into hotels or if we are going to apply for some service. However, that is precisely the same argument we have heard time and time again about the use of the social insurance number. If a person wants simply to do without services, he can do without them. He could simply choose not to produce his card and drop out of society. If this government is allowed to go forward unhindered and if the government goes ahead encouraging Canadians to take out such numbered cards and encourages their proliferation, we will find ourselves—not by plan, not by design, but by default—backing into the sort of citizen identification papers the Prime Minister said he saw as inevitable in 1971.

I see, Mr. Speaker, you are about to indicate that my time is up. Let me simply conclude by saying that the government had the opportunity in this legislation to do something about invasions of privacy as they relate to the social insurance number. The government had the ability to act with this