

Supply

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

SUPPLY

ALLOTTED DAY—CANADIAN SECURITY INTELLIGENCE SERVICE

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

Mr. Derek Lee (Scarborough—Rouge River): Mr. Speaker, my discourse was interrupted by Question Period. I will attempt to pick up roughly where we left off.

We were describing before we broke for Question Period the request of the Official Opposition for a royal commission and it was my view at that time, and it still is, that is an ill advised request.

• (1510)

We were discussing that in Canada we have statute law that oversees and creates CSIS. We have the Security Intelligence Review Committee that reviews the work of CSIS. We have a justice committee and a subcommittee on security and intelligence which looks at the same area. We also have the Solicitor General who stands in this House, responsible to Parliament and to the people of Canada for all of the matters under his ministry, including CSIS.

Why do we need a fourth or a fifth level of scrutiny or inquiry? Why do we need a royal commission? This House through its justice committee in the last Parliament in reviewing the CSIS act made 117 recommendations. Only two of the 117 recommendations were adopted by the government at that time. That was regrettable.

Thank heaven for small mercies. Two were adopted. One which was not accepted by government was the creation of a committee or subcommittee that would work in this area of security and intelligence. The government basically said to Parliament it does not want one. The justice committee said beg your pardon, excuse us, but there will be one.

All of the parties on the justice committee unanimously agreed to create the subcommittee on national security. That particular subcommittee was reborn in this Parliament. That provides Parliament with a particularly precise window with the ability to look into this area, the subject of debate today.

One of the reasons we believed the subcommittee was necessary was that although the Security Intelligence Review Committee, SIRC, works for Parliament and for Canadians on their behalf, the linkages between SIRC and Parliament were not strong. SIRC makes one annual report each year and can make

section 54 reports to the Solicitor General whenever it is deemed appropriate.

Those section 54 reports do not come directly to Parliament. I think I am correct in saying the reports do not ever get to Parliament. The procedures have not been live and green. As a result there needs to be a better linkage between SIRC and Parliament.

That is one of the reasons we have created the subcommittee, to provide that linkage, that relationship, between the oversight or review mechanism that SIRC is and Parliament with its general oversight mechanism for all of government.

I want to discuss the issue of potential cost of royal commissions. I think it was adequately addressed by one or two colleagues in the House. Some of the more recent royal commissions have cost between \$9 million and \$25 million per item. That is a lot of toast.

From my perspective the existing mechanisms of the statute of the Solicitor General, of SIRC and the subcommittee are able to cover the field and adequately address the questions that have been raised. If I am wrong then someone might be able to make a case for a royal commission, but at the moment I do not believe I am wrong. Time will tell. The next year or six months will tell. We will see how well SIRC, the subcommittee, the justice committee and members in this House deal with this particular set of issues.

Let us deal with the justice committee and the subcommittee on national security. For members here and for Canadians I want to acknowledge the resources that will be used as an alternative to a royal commission are already bought and paid for by the taxpayers. We are adequately resourced. We have research capability and we have the power to compel attendance. We have a subcommittee which is working in a relatively non-partisan fashion and a justice committee which is working in a relatively non-partisan fashion. I believe that we can do the job that Parliament has set out for us in the standing orders.

• (1515)

As I say, we have the resources. We have the power to compel. The wording of that power is called the power to call for persons and papers. That is basically the power to compel attendance and to require an answer. It is part of the law of Parliament. The law of Parliament has been here ever since this House was built and this country was formed. The law of Parliament began developing back when the barons forced King John, in the Magna Carta of 1215, to submit to a people's Parliament. They took some authority from the king. The Bill of Rights of 1689 is another large slice of authority for Parliament derived from the king.

We have the power to compel attendance. The power has been described with some derogation as an absolute power. I will not get into details on that now but it is an effective power.