

Supply

• (1140)

The last member was appointed from among the ranks of the NDP. Ever since I have been sitting on the Standing Committee on Justice and Legal Affairs and on the Sub-Committee on National Security—I have not seen the latter yet and I wonder whether it is really interested in meeting with us or even in doing its job—I have doubts about the kind of report all of them will be able to produce.

Where are the members representing the current Official Opposition? Where is the member supposed to represent the other opposition party in this House? They are nowhere to be found. We are asked to trust five individuals, appointed by our predecessors, who are looking into extremely important activities which have an impact on their own political party.

The main objective in creating CSIS was probably to have some control or to check into allegations but in reality this has not happened.

As crazy as it may seem, when the Canadian Security Intelligence Service was in the planning stages, some members and certain opposition parties said that there was no need to create a civilian body and that all that was needed was a piece of legislation clearly setting out the RCMP's frame of reference so that it would not go overboard.

For someone from Quebec who has lived through the 1970s, which were a turning point in the history of the province, this seems rather strange. I am not referring to myself as I was still quite young in those days. It is somewhat ridiculous to trust this agency once more, but again some people thought that the RCMP could still do the job.

The only thing I find reassuring is that when the Canadian Security Intelligence Service was created, there were those who thought that its mandate was too broad. I could not agree more with them and history has proven them right.

Similarly, the definition of the word "threat" is very controversial. And again I agree with those who thought at the time that it was so vague that it could encompass a variety of activities not even closely related to real security. Current events have borne this out.

The government is of the opinion that the definition should be interpreted in the context of, on one hand, the provisions protecting legitimate dissidence and limiting the agency's authority to what is strictly necessary and, on the other, the new monitoring and surveillance system. According to the government, within such a context, the definition is a reasonable one.

When I look more closely at the investigative power of SIRC and its access to information, I get scared. I get very, very scared.

Another concern of mine is the range of the SIRC mandate that allows it to use any investigation technique. The two most serious issues have to do with how this organization is being monitored: first, the office of the Inspector General must have access to information, and second, so must SIRC.

We must acknowledge that, before the Sub-Committee on National Security, I was told that SIRC has access to every document possible. Indeed, it has access to all this documentation, but only if the Canadian Security Intelligence Service agrees to hand it out. And that is not how things work out in reality.

SIRC does not have access to Cabinet documents, either. Yet, as we have learned recently, an assistant of a former Solicitor General of Canada can walk out with two cases of documents, with no questions asked, while SIRC is not even aware of the existence of such documentation. This really belongs in the realm of fiction.

Why can we not grant this investigative power to people who have a vested interest in the truth and are able to reassure the public? In fact, this issue was raised when Bill C-157 was debated. We examined the possibility of implementing some kind of parliamentary review, as recommended by the McDonald Commission. At the time, both Opposition parties and some government members supported the creation of a special Parliamentary committee which would have had access to information regarding CSIS to ensure that it does not overstep its mandate.

Madam Speaker, you are indicating that my time is almost up, yet I could go on and on.

I want the government to know that there is no way we can get definite answers to our questions if we leave it to SIRC. I have sat and I still sit on the Sub-Committee on National Security. When an elected member of Parliament, a legitimate representative of the people is told by witnesses that they do not have to answer either yes or no, we have a problem. A very serious problem indeed. The system is sick. The Canadian Security Intelligence Service has become a monster that no one can control, not even Parliamentarians, and this is totally unacceptable in 1994.

• (1145)

That is why only a royal commission of inquiry can get to the bottom of this issue. Taxpayers would then get satisfactory answers to questions they have been asking ever since the creation of CSIS in 1984.

Mr. Patrick Gagnon (Parliamentary Secretary to Solicitor General): Madam Speaker, I did indeed listen carefully to the comments made by my hon. colleague from the Opposition. First, the hon. member referred to events that occurred in 1970, which I think is a rather sensitive period, but we are not here to go through that again, since this was already covered by the McDonald Commission, which led to the creation of SIRC and CSIS.