

*Security Intelligence Service*

ation today deserves full and careful scrutiny. The Solicitor General (Mr. Kaplan) made reference in his remarks today to the fact there has been a long period of time under which the security service and the security capacity of our country has been under examination. I propose to deal at length later in my remarks with respect to this aspect of the matter, but the fact is that we finally have the opportunity of looking at this legislation on the floor of the House of Commons for the first time. This is the first occasion that the elected representatives of the people of Canada have had to enter into this particular debate over the 15 years referred to by the Solicitor General during which this matter has been under consideration.

This legislation seeks to establish a new civilian security force for Canada. That force, if formed, would differ from a standard police force in two critical respects: it would be granted powers to engage in intrusive surveillance far greater than those available at the present time to law enforcement agencies; secondly, it would use those powers as a means to achieve an objective which differs in kind and substance from the objective of police forces. Instead of investigating crimes and bringing criminals to justice, the new agency would be charged with the collection of information on Canadian groups and individuals as well as foreign nationals who have been targeted for surveillance. There can be no question about the fact that, even in a democratic society, knowledge is power. Governments and government agencies thrive on information and collect it assiduously. Once they have it, they are reluctant to divulge it except for their own purposes.

We have had a recent and clear example of how confidential information can be misused by this Government, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Finance (Mr. Lalonde) saw fit to direct his minions to scour the departmental files in an attempt to find written materials which could be used in a political way, and other ways, against the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Mulroney). Ultimately that attempt failed. In fact, the ruse that was used by the Minister of Finance backfired; he has been subjected to great criticism across this land for his actions in an attempt to sustain the life of a dying government in the dying days of a Parliament.

The fact that the Minister was unable to achieve his ends through the unauthorized use of confidential material is really not the point in this context, however. What is important is that there was an attempt made to use information submitted to the Government in confidence in order to achieve what I can only describe as crass political objectives. If the Minister of Finance or any Minister of Finance is prepared to stoop to such levels and hunt through Government files in order to find material which may be damaging with respect to any citizen of Canada, it is absolutely critical that information collected clandestinely by a security service not be subject to similar abuses.

That is why this Bill is so important. When we are dealing with legislation which proposes extraordinary powers for a branch of government that will operate of necessity in the shadows, we must be extremely vigilant to ensure that there is no chance that those powers might be abused.

Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned at the outset, we have waited far too long for specific government initiatives in this regard. On June 26, 1969 the report of the Royal Commission on Security, the Mackenzie Commission, was tabled in this House. After four hours of debate it apparently suffered the fate of a great many royal commission reports; it was shelved and its recommendations were ignored by the Government.

It is some 15 years since that report was received. During that time the security service branch of the RCMP has continued to operate in a form of limbo. It has seen, among other things, the appointment of a civilian director and the hiring of civilian personnel for non-operational positions. In 1977 another royal commission was appointed, that being the McDonald Commission, as the result of events which took place primarily during the 1970s and primarily related to the activities of the FLQ in the Province of Quebec. By virtue of questions that were raised on the floor of the House of Commons, the Government had no recourse but to establish a royal commission to look at the circumstances surrounding allegations of impropriety that occurred at that particular time. I will refer to this matter later on in my remarks with respect to this legislation.

● (1420)

However, I think it is important for us to remember, Mr. Speaker, that during the course of the debate in the House of Commons leading to the McDonald Commission, not once did a member of the government of the day led by the present Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau), the Solicitor General or any member of the executive branch of the government of our country, stand and accept any responsibility whatsoever with respect to any of the occurrences that took place in the security branch under the direction of the Government of Canada.

Part of the mandate of the McDonald Commission was to report and advise regarding the policies and procedures governing the activities of the RCMP in the discharge of its responsibility to the security of Canada. The McDonald Commission reported in 1981 and presented some specific recommendations with respect to security matters. Yet it was not until May of 1983 that the Government got around to presenting the first draft of any legislation whatsoever. This was a delay of some two years, during which time heaven knows what went through the mind of the Minister. The Commission had spoken. The Minister sat mute for two years cogitating, reflecting and considering a response with respect to recommendations made by that Commission. It is hard to believe that after two years the Minister had to give the most serious consideration worthy of that Minister sitting in the other place, a place of sober thought. He had sufficient opportunity and time to consider his response, but it took him two years. It is hard to believe that with two years to draft legislation a Bill as flawed as Bill C-157 was the best that could be produced by this Minister and the Government.