

National Library Act

amendment I will now make at the third reading stage. I suppose this is the penalty for having been so long in the house that we have become accustomed to the days when ordinary members of parliament really had some fundamental say in what went on with regard to the day to day business of parliament.

● (8:50 p.m.)

We have unfortunately arrived at a stage in the evolution of parliament at which the position of the private member is being downgraded and the position of the executive in our governmental system is being enhanced to a degree which I feel is not in the best interest of democracy in this country. It is on this point that I wish to speak briefly. Those Members of Parliament who are privileged to be on the committee on Films, Broadcasting and the Arts will know that the question I intend to discuss tonight was discussed in some length in that committee. However, I make no apology for repeating matters tonight because unfortunately our committee system is so bogged down in a mass of details in terms of giving private members an opportunity to participate adequately in the on-going process of parliament. The committee system is so bogged down in a mass of details, members are so hard-pressed to spread themselves over the multiplicity of committees, that it is almost impossible to come to grips with the real issues of legislation as it passes through the legislative mill.

I could use this as an occasion on which to make some sort of plea to the government, to the executive arm of parliament, to give the committee system some badly needed assistance. If we want it to function successfully we must provide increased research assistance, a greater opportunity to deal with legislative matters in depth. We must take up the slack which has occurred because of the short-circuiting of what used to be known as the committee of the whole in the House of Commons. There was a time when in order to maintain a close control of the executive one could, on the spur of the moment, arising from an issue which emerged in the course of discussion, bring in an amendment. Nowadays, unfortunately, we do not have such an opportunity.

The particular bill before the house is of some significance in the field of communications in Canada to the extent that it deals with the formal establishment of a national library service. The first bill of this sort was enacted in 1952 and of course, we were faced

at that time with a situation in which we had an act of parliament but no library other than the Parliamentary Library and the services it provided. The bill now before the house is related to the new facilities which have become available to house the national library and the archives, a project which got under way in 1962.

As I compare the old act with the bill now before the house, I contend that the emphasis placed on the function of the minister with respect to the administration of the National Library is considerably greater in the new legislation than in the old. We are all aware that to ensure a healthy democracy adequate communication facilities are essential. They carry the main burden of providing the cement which holds the nation together. Communications facilities provide the educational, cultural and information services which are necessary to an adequate dialogue within the nation with respect to urgent issues of national importance, particularly national unity. We maintain a Post Office Department—

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Oh?

Mr. Dinsdale: —operated directly by the Government of Canada as one of the basic ingredients of this process of communication. It has often been suggested that the Post Office should be separated from government and I think the present Postmaster General is one of the leading exponents of this view as he tries to downgrade, or upgrade, depending on one's viewpoint, the postal service in connection with the changes which have recently taken place.

The government has also become deeply involved in the provision of communications services through the mass media of broadcasting. The Parliament of Canada authorizes substantial sums annually to make it possible for a Crown agency, the C.B.C., reporting to this house through the Secretary of State (Mr. Pelletier) to carry on an adequate system of electronic communication. In all other information operations having to do with the sensitive subject of educational and cultural services the Government of Canada has always done its utmost to create at least the fiction, or the impression, that these facilities as they are operated at federal level are in no way directly connected with the government itself. The C.B.C., for example, is operated by a Crown agency. The National Museums, which are closely related to the kind of services provided by the National Library, have, in accordance with a recent amendment to the