

Supply

Mr. St-Laurent: Madam Speaker, of course, we must take certain guidelines into account, and this is provided for in this context.

However, the question raised here today is that we believe it is particularly absurd to see the lack of control by the House of Commons over an institution to which it pays so many millions of dollars every year and from which it really cannot get answers. On the contrary, people are asked to answer questions simply.

They do not have to give exact details on individuals in particular with specific dates and amounts; these things are not asked, especially when we are in committee. We ask people to tell us how it works and what happens internally. We talk about different aspects which have something to do with the way our tax dollars are spent.

We give \$200 million dollars a year to CSIS, Madam Speaker, but I cannot explain to my constituents how the money is spent. I can only say to them that I do not have the slightest idea of how CSIS spends this money. I know that it hires people, of course. But what do they do exactly?

The people from across the way do not seem to be interested in speaking about what happened before, but we must not forget that it did happen. It is part of our history, and it must not be forgotten. We must not be afraid of repeating that the taxpayers' money was used for terrorist acts specially directed at some Quebecers accused of separatist activities.

With this in mind, we are justified in asking this question: will the taxpayers' money be used again for terrorist activities? This is the question we are asking today. It is a monster gone out of control.

Mr. Patrick Gagnon (Parliamentary Secretary to Solicitor General): Madam Speaker, it is false to claim that activities of this kind take place in Canada. I believe that the hon. member has the privilege of sitting here in the House of Commons, the right to express his opinions and the privilege of sitting on the Sub-Committee on National Security. He has the privilege of asking questions about the performance of SIRC and the estimates tabled in the House every year.

I think it is not a matter of money but of realizing that we have the mechanisms to ensure our security. In fact, according to a number of international experts, this mechanism does not exist in any other country. You know, in France when you get off the subway, you often see French policemen doing ID checks. That is not the kind of society we have here in Canada. We have a free, liberal and generous society with great respect for the freedom of the individual.

It is not my purpose to defend our past performances, because I was not there. I have to admit I was not around at the beginning and the end of the sixties. But today, we have the mechanisms we need to ensure there is no abuse of power with respect to legitimate organizations, including political parties.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Maheu): Before we continue this debate, I wish to inform the hon. member that he may use the 30 seconds he has left.

Mr. St-Laurent: Madam Speaker, I will do that, but instead of a lengthy reply, I just want to make a brief comment.

The hon. member opposite said that I had the privilege to do this and the privilege to do that. I also have the right.

Mr. Gagnon: Of course.

Mr. St-Laurent: I have that right, because I was duly elected by people who pay their taxes, whom I represent here in the House. I am now exercising the right I was given by the electorate.

Mr. Pierre de Savoye (Portneuf): Madam Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague from Manicouagan for sharing ten minutes of his speaking time with me. Allow me to add my voice to that of my Bloc Quebecois colleagues and ask this House to blame the government for refusing to set up a royal commission of inquiry on illegal activities of the Canadian Security Intelligence Service.

• (1235)

Let me remind you that CSIS was allotted a budget of about \$205 million for fiscal year 1994-95. From a strictly accounting point of view, it is obvious that this House has not only the right but indeed the duty to look into the activities of this agency.

But we are not here to talk about accounting today. This debate is about the very activities of the Canadian Security Intelligence Service, nothing less.

I should point out that this agency was established out of concern for transparency, to follow up on the recommendations of the McDonald Commission, which had uncovered a disgraceful set of unacceptable, if not downright illegal, practices and actions by the RCMP's very own security service.

Although the Canadian Security Intelligence Service was established with transparency in mind, there are nonetheless two major problems with CSIS. First, it does not have to account to Parliament for its budget, which it receives from Parliament. What this means is that we, who represent the people we were elected by, have no way of knowing how our tax money is spent. That is absurd!

The second problem with the accountability of CSIS to this Parliament relates to its intelligence gathering activities. Some may quickly answer back that the annual report CSIS tables every year is public and that a monitoring committee, commonly known as SIRC, reviews all its activities. Unfortunately, the reports tabled in this House in that respect are rather laconic, they do not say much. They are the epitome of the lack of transparency.