

Mr. MacEachen: I am not in a position to indicate at this stage what system of government record keeping will be involved in the future, but that is the present attitude of the government.

Mr. Diefenbaker: Oh; income tax, and so on?

Mr. Pearson: Certainly not.

Of course, Mr. Pearson was the Prime Minister at that time.

Mr. Diefenbaker: The Prime Minister is butting in. I ask him, will he give the undertaking on behalf of the government that this information will not be made available to other departments of government? We want to know that this is not a snooping operation for the use of the government.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Pearson: Mr. Speaker, the same and, I would hope, more effective precautions will be taken in this regard as were taken under the regime of the right hon. gentleman.

Honourable senators, all that that means is that at that time the Leader of the Conservative Party, who was then the Leader of the Opposition, sought and obtained an undertaking from the government of the day, including the Prime Minister and the Minister of Labour, that they would not use the social insurance number for any purpose other than the Canada Pension Plan.

● (2100)

Now we have Bill C-139, which was brought in by the government, passed by the House of Commons on August 29 and given Royal Assent on September 13, doing exactly what Mr. Diefenbaker objected to—namely, handing over such authority to the super-snoopers in the—

Senator Barootes: Liberal Party.

Senator Olson:—Department of National Revenue. That is why I am asking the Leader of the Government to honour the commitments made by past governments and to give consideration to the millions of Canadians who resent the use of the social insurance number in this way. If the leader will give that undertaking, I will accept it for a while; if not, I should like to put a motion before the chamber.

Senator Murray: Honourable senators, I hope I understood the honourable senator correctly, because for almost as long as I have been paying income tax I, as have all of us, have had to write my social insurance number on the income tax form. I do it every year. The honourable senator seems scandalized by that fact, but, if he will look up the forms of the Department of National Revenue, which he has undoubtedly filled in every year, he will see that he has added his SIN.

However, I have heard the commitments made by the then minister, Mr. MacEachen as he was then, and by the then Prime Minister, Mr. Pearson, and I shall be glad to determine to what extent those commitments have been respected by all governments since then, including the present government, and, if there has been a change of policy, I shall so state it in the chamber.

[Senator Olson.]

Senator Olson: Honourable senators, let me ask what I hope is my final question on this matter. The government has brought in a bill. Before that bill was brought in it was not an offence to open a bank account or to buy guaranteed interest-bearing certificates of any kind without giving your social insurance number, and the banks or the financial institutions were not obliged under the law to obtain that number.

An Hon. Senator: Yes, they were.

Senator Olson: No, they were not. Not until that bill was passed and given Royal Assent on September 13 did it become an offence—an offence for both parties. That bill makes matters worse. I have not said that things were perfect before that bill. I realize that there has been a steady encroachment. As a matter of fact, in his report the Privacy Commissioner has commented to the effect that there has been a tremendous degradation of privacy in this country because of the government's use of the social insurance number.

This bill is an even worse insult. Canadians can no longer open bank accounts or buy financial instruments without giving their number, which means that in many cases it will show up in the income tax department and, according to the Privacy Commissioner, in about 1,500 private data banks in this country. I ask the minister to withdraw that provision.

Hon. Henry D. Hicks: Honourable senators, I have a supplementary question. Is the minister aware that when you apply for a salmon fishing licence, for example, in his province of New Brunswick, you are obliged to give your social insurance number?

Senator Murray: Honourable senators, I was not aware of that point either.

Senator Frith: The salmon are entitled to know!

Senator Nurgitz: It makes good sense to me.

Senator Murray: However, I am aware that it frequently happens that, when one goes into a place of business seeking to conduct some business and does not have other identification, one is asked for one's social insurance number. It happens all the time.

Senator Olson: But, until this bill, you were not obliged by law to give it.

Hon. Eymard G. Corbin: Honourable senators, I have a supplementary question for the Leader of the Government in the Senate. Is he aware that insurance companies are now sending memos and notes to people they insure asking them for their social insurance number? This is totally new. I received a letter from La Laurentienne, an insurance company with which I have been insured for years. For the first time in my life I was told by them that under the law and the regulations I was obligated to supply them with my SIN. I did not supply the number, and I hope that people in this house hear what I am saying. Instead, I scribbled a note asking, "Under what law and under what regulation are you obliging me to supply you with my social insurance number?" To this day I am awaiting an answer. I feel that the insurance company is invading my privacy. Is the minister aware of such actions?