

Archives of Canada

● (1500)

Some of that information which was available to us who were working in this area was obtained from private corporations, Crown corporations, information from foreign government sources and indeed information from the security forces. In the early days, of course, the trade union movement was considered a source of subversion in this country and was very carefully monitored by the RCMP. That monitoring is exactly the kind of thing which could easily be eliminated from the Archives of the future by the kind of gaps that exist in this legislation.

I hope we can give this Bill the kind of scrutiny it deserves so that the legislative committee can correct some of the gaps which these important social science groups and working historians have pointed out to us.

Mr. Edwards: Mr. Speaker, I want to express my personal appreciation for the quality of debate today. We are having an excellent examination of this subject this afternoon.

I want to set the record straight on one matter. It has never been the Government's intention to move this Bill through the House with little or no discussion, as the suggestion was made. The only purpose, if there is general consent, is to expedite the Bill through the House so that the most thorough discussion can take place in the committee. Of course, we are prepared, as I assume the legislative committee would be prepared, to give total and thorough examination to the very valid questions that have been raised by Members opposite.

Mr. Langdon: Mr. Speaker, I was not suggesting that there was an effort to put the legislation through with little discussion. I was simply quoting the concerns of the Social Science Federation with respect to that concern. That is why I hope there would be a broader debate of the kind we are having this afternoon.

Mr. Tupper: Mr. Speaker, I too want to compliment everyone who has spoken on this Bill, including the Minister who introduced it and those in the Opposition who have spoken.

I am one who has had the privilege over the years to have used the Archives. Members of my family have indeed used it more extensively than I.

You may feel a similar sentiment to mine, Mr. Speaker, about the disappearance of the term "Dominion Archives" and "Dominion Archivist". I think it is a bit of a dichotomy, when we are dealing with an institution today that is responsible for the preservation of our history, to have such a noble term dropped from its name. However, I know that countries and nations of people must move onward.

I welcome this Bill. The legislation sets out the terms of reference for the Archivist and really brings the Public Archives into the 1980s by updating legislation that was introduced some 70 years ago.

I could speak at length about the merits of the Archives and the good work it was doing. My colleague, the Hon. Member

for Essex—Windsor (Mr. Langdon), spoke at some length about the Social Science Federation of Canada and some of its concerns about the Bill. He was correct in bringing those concerns forward and I commend him for doing so.

The Social Science Federation of Canada is composed of some 23 learned societies, one of which is the Canadian Historical Society. I want to quote from a document from the Social Science Federation of Canada dated May, 1986. The second paragraph on page 1 reads:

The SSFC is delighted that the government of Canada has recently tabled Bill C-95, an Act respecting the Archives of Canada, as this will provide a long-overdue replacement for the Public Archives Act of 1912. This new legislation will place the Archives of Canada, an institution so critical to the preservation of the records of Canada's past, on a much sounder basis. Equally important is the fact that the new Act would replace chapter 460 of the current Administrative Policy Manual and give the Archivist of Canada and his staff statutory control over the preservation and destruction of all records of the Government of Canada.

Not only should this ensure that material which ought to be preserved is saved from the shredder, but by extending the definition of Government records to include "ministerial records" the Act should plug one of the major loopholes by which important materials passed in the private domain and out of the control of the Archives.

While the proposed Act seems to represent a desirable change, and is one which we wish to see enacted with all due speed—

I simply wanted to read that into the record, in addition to what my colleague, the Hon. Member for Essex—Windsor, related to the House with respect to the presentation of their concerns.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): Does the Hon. Member for Essex—Windsor wish to comment?

Mr. Langdon: Mr. Speaker, I have no disagreement with what has been said, except to make the point that the key feature which has been part of the communication we received from the federation is its statement that the Bill contains major defects which it would like to bring to our attention. I believe the federation's intent is to make certain that the positive aspects which have been noted by my colleague are carried through while, at the same time, the defects are corrected and that hopefully we will be able to set that as an objective for the legislative committee stage of the Bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): The Hon. Member for Edmonton East rises on a question or comment?

Mr. Lesick: Debate, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): We are still on questions or comments. Are there any further questions or comments? Debate.

Mr. William G. Lesick (Edmonton East): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure and honour for me to speak to Bill C-95, an Act respecting the Archives of Canada and records of government institutions of Canada and to amend the Copyright Act. It is time that we cleared the dust and removed the cobwebs from the legislation of 1912 by replacing it with this Bill which is long overdue. I am very proud that our Government has seen fit to take this step.