

Statistics Act

there were others when we did ask for information and did not get it. The experience was a frustrating one.

Another subject of enormous importance to Canada is the whole question of foreign ownership. We possess a lot of information about foreign ownership now, information about investment, information about imports and exports, information as to how much of the funds of foreign companies is raised outside Canada. Most of this information exists inside the Bureau of Statistics in one form or another, yet no one in the Bureau, to my knowledge, has ever taken this information and put it together in a meaningful pattern so that we could look at it and understand all the implications. We had to wait for the Watkins Commission before we could get some of this information. It depended on researchers like Kari Levitt; we had to wait for people like Ed. Safarian to compile his study. In short, the country had to wait for years for private writers to put this information together. And not all the information they required was available to them. They had to send out questionnaires and carry on a large amount of private research. In other areas, they simply had to guess.

One would have thought that in connection with an issue as important as foreign ownership those responsible for setting guidelines affecting the DBS would have shown greater interest in making sure this information was available. One can only reach the conclusion that the minister or the policy makers responsible have never wanted the Bureau to be as comprehensive in its studies as I have suggested; they have been satisfied to see the Bureau do the least amount of work that would get by; they have never set out a program encouraging the DBS to look for information which would be helpful in the future. The tendency, I suggest, has always been to under-rate the work of the Bureau and to ask that it spend a little less money.

It seems we have something against the taking of statistics. The Bureau has always been an adopted child; it has never had full status in the overall picture of government and public functions. I have had some critical things to say about the DBS but I should make it clear that this criticism is not directed toward the personnel of the Bureau. I have met many of them on numerous occasions and I think they are a most competent group of people. They really do a good job. The problem does not lie with them. When I have asked them for certain information which they were not compiling, they have said: Well, we do whatever we can within the budget allotted to us. The real responsibility lies with the policy makers in the government for not having set before the Bureau the kind of tasks which, I am suggesting, are essential in a modern society.

My hon. friends and I will be supporting the bill because it does make some improvements and it does move in the direction we think should be taken. For example, it makes available taxation statistics which we believe to be important because there is a great deal we do not know and shall not know until we have access to taxation statistics. For example, we do not know how much it costs to go on with this commercialized society,

[Mr. Saltsman.]

so dependent upon product differentiation, in which companies incur enormous selling costs—and advertising is only one of these costs—which are not all reflected in the price of the product. I have asked what it all comes to—I am thinking of such things as depreciation allowances, and so on—but I have never received a satisfactory answer. These are important questions when we begin to talk about tax reform. I suspect that selling costs, depreciation allowances and the various fringe benefits available to business run into hundreds of millions of dollars each year and represent tax benefits which have never been visible to the general public but which should be visible to the general public. This part of the bill will be of some assistance and I hope it will be used for the purpose I have indicated.

• (3:50 p.m.)

I also hope that the minister responsible for DBS will show a little imagination, come into the modern world and see the need for the additional kind of information that I have suggested today. Perhaps eventually, though not waiting 15 years, he will bring in a bill which reflects the changing mood of society and the need to measure quality as well as quantity.

Mr. A. D. Hales (Wellington): Mr. Speaker, I have a few words to say about this very important bill. I admit I have not given the bill detailed study, but a very important principle is at stake here. This is why I do not think we should move too fast in sending it to committee. I refer to the matter of secrecy.

People have always felt that their personal income tax returns were private, that no one other than officials of the Department of National Revenue should have access to the file. In this bill, the government is asking that people employed by DBS be given access to all income tax files in the Department of National Revenue, not only the files of corporations and small businesses, but of individuals. This is one more encroachment on the privacy of the individual, another case of how far the camel has got his nose into the tent.

I want to express my opposition to this abrogation of a very fundamental principle. We are going to give people who work at DBS the right to take income tax files of individuals. These files will be in the area offices, will be transported to DBS offices where the personnel will take what they want from them, and then be transported to national revenue. We do not know what will happen to them during transportation. It is all very well for the government to say there is secrecy, but I do not think that the secrecy will be all that dependable.

I think there should be some alternative course proposed. I feel that the government would be pursuing a much better course by setting up within the Department of National Revenue a statistics branch, if I may call it that, which would provide the information that is required. Under the present arrangement I can see a conflict arising between departments and staffs. There will be no end to the problems that may arise. I suggest the files should be kept where they belong, namely in the Department of National Revenue. A principle is involved