

*Statistics Act Amendment*

I can appreciate the desire of the government to have all possible information at its disposal in order to ensure that its decisions are empirically grounded. However, when you weigh that limitless knowledge against the equally total destruction of an individual's personal privacy and integrity, the price becomes too high.

I agree with the view that a government that is big enough to give you everything you want is also a government that is big enough to take everything you have.

Section 29 of the Statistics Act provides for criminal prosecution of those individuals who refuse to answer StatsCan survey questions. The penalties are up to \$500 in fines, three months in jail, or both.

Why are these legal sanctions so onerous and how do they make StatsCan surveys ultimately counterproductive? Section 29 of the Statistics Act provides a legal justification for a blatant invasion of personal privacy.

The family expenditures survey, which we nearly moved toward last March, is typical of the excessive demands made upon the time and the privacy of the individual. Let me give a few examples. The question on family expenditure on home repairs and maintenance alone was broken down into 21 subsections. These dealt with wallpapering, painting, gutters, etc., down to the smallest detail. Small electrical appliances required more than 17 subsections. Clothing expenses were dealt with in a mere six pages. Not only that, other questions asked about things like how much money each householder lost in wages, payment of fines, deposits, thefts in a year, how much money was held in savings, what the value of insurance policies and real estate holdings was. These questions certainly are not in the realm of "trivial". They are, indeed, highly personal in nature. Moreover, the interviewee is bound by law to answer them as accurately as he or she can.

Lest some of us believe that these fines lack teeth, that no one is ever prosecuted so we should just go ahead with this, I would like to draw attention to a problem encountered by one of my constituents, Mrs. Angela Sheremata. Mrs. Sheremata objected to certain questions on the seemingly innocent 1976 population census form. For example, she saw no reason why she should have to indicate through what kind of entrance she went into her private living quarters. Because she received the more detailed form which is sent to part of the population each census, she was also requested to indicate, among other things, what her level of education was, how many hours she had worked for pay on her own farm, business or professional practice, which visitors had stayed overnight on May 31, and what was her telephone number. I suggest to you, Mr. Speaker, that if a person had been involved in a divorce case and required that information to be kept private, he or she would not have been able to do so.

In addition she was asked, should she have a privately listed telephone number—the reason for which in the beginning was to maintain privacy—to give the number, as a result of which that right of privacy would be lost. The government in fact requires you to reveal that telephone number and where you live.

At any rate, she was asked to answer these questions, the answers to which she felt it was none of the government's business to know. What did she get for her belief in the sanctity of human privacy? She started out first by getting several letters from StatsCan threatening her with legal action, and finally the reality of court itself. It is amusing to realize that the case against Mrs. Sheremata was thrown out of court. The reason it was thrown out of court was that StatsCan had lost her file. That was amusing, yes, but the gravity of the situation should not be overlooked.

People have been prosecuted for refusing to answer Statistics Canada questions. Statistics Canada is in fact appealing the decision of the court in Mrs. Sheremata's case. It is not good enough to say that legal sanctions can be retained because they are hardly ever invoked. They are invoked in fact and in practice and they remain a threat to the fundamental human right to privacy of Canadians.

These kinds of questions become particularly onerous for rural respondents. Residents of rural areas often find that those conducting the interviews are their neighbours or close associates. It is understandable that a person would be reluctant to surrender information of a personal nature to someone the interviewee knew, yet this is what happens with StatsCan, and it happens across the country.

I have met interviewers who say that it is very interesting to get to know about your neighbours or about the neighbourhood community and about how people are living. While that information may be claimed to be private, I think practice has shown that leaks and so forth make this information readily available in many cases to many parts of our society.

Rural citizens are not the only ones who have cause for concern about the increasing detail of Statistics Canada surveys. Canadians in general are concerned about other ways by which the government is gathering information about them. Take, for example, the issue of social insurance numbers. Some feel that just having these numbers is an indication of the increasing depersonalization of our society. Others are concerned that social insurance numbers could be used for a more sinister purpose, that of contributing to a central file on each and every Canadian citizen. This central file has the potential to be comprehensive indeed. It would include personal economic information from income tax forms, information on activities for which social insurance numbers were necessary, and then, with StatsCan data, a wide variety of personal details on the citizen's lifestyle. It is no wonder that we are witnessing widespread opposition to the concept of social insurance numbers. It is easy to see that this opposition is a manifestation of a deeper distrust for government intrusion into the private lives of Canadians.

• (1710)

We are now in a position which no government which aspires to democratic principles should find itself, that of defending itself against charges of intruding into the bedrooms, and indeed the bathrooms, of society. The government must attempt to justify that this is not simply an embarrass-