News Sources Protection Act

such events risk their lives. This is done for one very important reason—so that the citizens of the country are provided with exact and rapid information. Surely this bill would destroy the reputation for honest and exact reporting held by reporters who take these risks and make these efforts.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Speaker, our press corps enjoys at the present time a reputation which is surely the envy of press people in many countries of the world. That is one reason why I cannot support Bill C-41. By giving our support to such an undertaking, I am convinced, Mr. Speaker, that the reputation which our press corps now enjoys will suffer greatly, since, because of existing legislation, the Canadian people are sure of the veracity of any particular report or piece of news.

If we should be irresponsible enough to accept the principles of Bill C-41, it would cast a doubt in the mind of the reader on the truth of reported facts. The reader would perhaps feel free, although without reason, to question this alleged veracity. I say "alleged veracity", for if information sources are not to be disclosed anymore, would it be not possible, even in this country, to see the creation of artificial information sources or of sources entertaining revolutionary ideas, which, under the cover of anonymity, would do irremediable harm to our country or would destroy the reputation of honesty enjoyed by members of the press in Canada.

[*English*]

Another role the press is called upon to perform in our democratic system is to criticize governments in office when the opposition is too weak to offer positive and constructive criticism. May I add that the press performs this function very well in the present situation. Mr. Speaker, you may think I am drifting from the subject, but I wish to establish the important role the press is called upon to perform in our parliamentary system. The existing law is to reassure Canadians that they are honestly informed and that the minority is honestly represented. There is no doubt in my mind that, with the existing law, the information furnished by reporters is of the highest credibility.

● (1740)

Support of this bill amending the existing law would cast serious doubt on the future of the very important role which the press performs in our parliamentary system. Can you imagine a politically interested reporter who would resort to so-called artificial information or, may I say, non-existent sources of information to attack or accuse certain people or parties of wrongdoing just because the law had been amended and the door opened for such practices? For these reasons, Mr. Speaker, I wish to register my opposition to this bill.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Romeo LeBlanc (Westmorland-Kent): Mr. Speaker, I can understand the feelings which prompted the hon. member for Timiskaming (Mr. Peters) to introduce this bill but it seems to me that if he wants to protect journalists against some possible abuses, he also opens the door to dangers we cannot ignore.

[Mr. Ethier.]

As a former journalist, I take part in this debate for a few moments because I think that we deceive ourselves enormously if we think the quality of information can depend on some sensational leaks which can occur, by exception, and which would not be the outcome of continued, lasting work.

I think that in many cases information is available. It is sufficient that journalists work on it, that newspaper owners pay journalists well and give them enough leisure time to pursue the information work they want to do. I think that in many cases the judgments we give on some journalists should rather apply to the owners of newspapers who make them work too rapidly and in a way journalists could not accept if we want them to do careful and serious work.

Mr. Speaker, it seems to me that giving to a particular group the privilege claimed by the hon. member for Timiskaming (Mr. Peters) is creating a new category of citizens, and I do not know many professional journalists—and I emphasize the word "professional", because I feel that in that trade one must be professional—I do not know many professional journalists who do not prefer a system under which they have to defend what they write, rather than to take refuge behind some kind of shield known as legal privilege.

Mr. Speaker, that is why I cannot support this bill and I think that on reflection my hon. colleagues will do the same.

[*English*]

Mr. Rod Blaker (Lakeshore-Lachine): Mr. Speaker, I rise somewhat in the same mood of examination of this bill as the hon. member for York West (Mr. Fleming) who spent a considerable number of years in the business of journalism. It has been said that inside every fat man there is a thin man screaming to be let out. Perhaps inside every lawyer there is a journalist screaming to be let out. I might add, therefore, that I spent the greater part of my professional life in law before becoming a journalist, so that I find the bill presented by the hon. member for Timiskaming (Mr. Peters) particularly interesting to me and, I think, to many people including my confreres both in law and in journalism.

If I were to begin an examination of the bill, I believe it would be first in terms of what we expect from our system of justice. It has been mentioned in earlier speeches on this subject that there is a possible, although I believe not a necessary, contradiction between the interests of our system of justice, which requires the full disclosure of truth not only for the benefit of a defendant in a criminal trial but also for the benefit of the public, and the interests of the public which require access to the greatest possible degree of information.

Of course, the bill of the hon. member for Timiskaming bill is intended, and I think would in some measure be successful in that regard, to encourage individuals who might not otherwise be prepared to speak to journalists to do so in the knowledge that they would be guaranteed anonymity and that the journalists in turn could not be compelled in a court of law to reveal their sources of information and the documentation or, as in the most