

Constituency Records

When public archives no longer permitted MPs to dead file their files in that fashion, I began to wonder if it would be possible to have microfilming done, but that process did not seem to be available. As a result I began to store things in various nooks and corners of the office but this is not a very satisfactory arrangement. However, one day I was in the parliamentary restaurant, curious as to what lay behind the various wall of this building. I am sorry that the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) is not here as is usual on Friday afternoon because I am going to tell one of his better guarded secrets.

If hon. members who are familiar with the restaurant upstairs want to probe around, they will probably find in the order of ten to twelve rather old filing cabinets, each containing upwards of 1,000 files, all belonging to the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre, who has spent 30 years in this House. I have never told him that I found out where he stores his dead files, so I expect next Friday afternoon when he is reading *Hansard* he will come across the floor and give me the devil for talking about it. But he has never found the solution to the storage problem either. What he has done is that he has relied on his friendships, contacts and his well deserved reputation in the House and has the roof of the House of Commons under the rafters jammed to the doorways with his original files collected over the years—

An hon. Member: Twenty-nine filing cabinets.

Mr. Blaker: Is it 29? I did not do an actual count. I suggested there were several thousand of them. It is incredible. While we have all come to believe that the man is eternal, it is probable according to the statistics that one day he will no longer be in a position to deal with these files and, of course, we have no rules here as to what to do with them.

Mr. Paproski: And he won't give them up.

Mr. Blaker: The hon. member for Edmonton Centre (Mr. Paproski) says he will not give them up. How true that is. He does not give them up in his office either.

That is one of the problems the hon. member responsible for this bill I thought might try to solve. Perhaps one day we will get microfilm legislation which will handle this difficulty. However, I believe Bill C-244 does not go the root of the problem.

There is another difficulty concerning this matter. The hon. member has argued that the contents of these files are not only subject to the law of trust but they are also held in either the solicitor-client relationship or in something so similar to it that the general principles of the solicitor-client relationship should obtain. I agree with him. Having said that, nothing in this bill seems to offer the assurance to the citizen, or non-citizen for that matter, under his definition of a constituency record, that that information shall remain confidential unless and until he has given his consent to the handling of the documentation. While I understand the interest in the subject matter of documents, it seems to me that we are not only concerned with that; we are also concerned with the exchange of information,

the exchange of opinion, the exchange of data, expressions by either a member of parliament or expressions by the individual citizen.

The vast majority of citizens would be more than a little disturbed to find that a committee of two or three members of parliament or whips, or whoever it might be, had suddenly acquired the power and the authorization to dispose of the correspondence of those citizens without the expressed consent of those citizens beforehand. This raises another problem. Generally in law practice there is some financial interest, together with a professional interest, in seeing to it that out of date files, or current but not active files, are moved along either to other members in the partnership, when one partner dies, or they are moved along to other law firms in the event it is a sole practitioner who has been unable to keep up his practice for whatever reason or has died. There is no direction as to how to handle the incredible pile of documentation and correspondence that we as members of parliament seem to acquire.

There is not much interest on the part of any other member, regardless of his party affiliation, to take over files from one of his colleagues.

I suppose if there were any interest it would probably be on the part of another party's member who might have gained the seat and who would be curious to know how his predecessor had handled correspondence, et cetera, in the riding. But we do not have an essential, important and rational motivation as to how to deal with these things.

The hon. member's bill comes at an opportune time. Summertime is when a lot of us start carrying out files. I hesitate to destroy any of these files, not only because of the documentation itself but because citizens who write to me are entitled to feel that the opinions they express are not simply thrown into a garbage pail. On the other hand, after five and one-half years in parliament I am beginning to wonder if the building will withstand the weight of all the files which I am collecting. Sometimes we think about attempting to contact citizens in an effort to gain their consent to destroy files. However, mobility is such a factor in Canadian life that it would take months to find all the people who originally wrote to me. Some of them are dead, and I would have to look into the question of whether there are any rights in their estate to take any action. Sometimes I find constituents have moved to other parts of Canada to addresses unknown. I cannot cope—

Mr. Dick: Mr. Speaker, I am rising on a point of order. I agree with my hon. friend who presently has the floor on a number of points which he has brought up. It is sort of like a devil's advocate bill in that I want to have an airing of the topic. I would be pleased to have someone move the motion to discharge the bill but to send the subject matter to committee, where it could perhaps be dealt with in more detail—

An hon. Member: It is not important enough to do.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ethier): Order, please.