

Supply

• (1215)

The hon. member made a comment that he does not want secrets for secret's sake. How are highly classified documents labelled as such? Does the hon. member know?

Mr. Gagnon: Madam Speaker, actually I do not know and that is the idea of the inquest being held by SIRC. It is to look into these various allegations. The hon. member also brought forward before the committee a number of questions. I am told there are more than 130.

I am sure that we will have to answer many of those questions and surely others put forward by the Bloc members as well as members on this side. I can assure the hon. member that I hope we will be able to answer a lot of them.

Again, it will be up to the Solicitor General to make sure that the information made public will not undermine the national security interests of Canada. I am convinced that a lot of these questions will be answered to the satisfaction of the opposition.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean H. Leroux (Shefford): Madam Speaker, I would have a question for the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Solicitor General. I listened carefully to his speech and I must tell you that it sounded to me like he had a lot of good to say about the previous administration. To listen to him, I wonder why he did not run for the Conservative Party in the last elections if everything was going so well.

Considering that we have a democratic system and that nothing is more sacred than democracy in this country, in Canada and Quebec, does he not agree that it would be interesting from time to time to have a commission, whether royal or not—I say royal commission because that is how they are called in Canada—to have a high-level commission investigate, especially when officials of the SIRC appearing before a sub-committee refuse to answer certain questions?

They did not answer all the questions. Would it not be time to have a commission investigate and shed light on this so that the people of Canada know exactly what is happening?

Mr. Gagnon: Madam Speaker, unlike the hon. member's leader and Leader of the Opposition, I never ran for the Conservative Party. But I can tell you this: for one thing, let us allow let the process to run its course.

First of all, the SIRC was established specifically to answer questions raised by the member opposite as well as by interest groups. So, based on the facts or evidence submitted to us concerning the allegations made against CSIS, I trust we will be able to make an informed decision regarding this service. I think we should let the organization do its job. I am convinced that the

hon. member opposite and our colleague from the Reform Party will have ample opportunity to scrutinize the report in October.

[English]

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Maheu): Before resuming debate, I would like to read a quote from Beauchesne's sixth edition, citation 478. This morning a couple of times I hesitated to interrupt speakers but citation 478 states:

The proceedings of a committee may not be referred to in debate before they have been laid upon the Table.

I would just ask hon. members to be aware of this rule.

[Translation]

Mr. Bernard St-Laurent (Manicouagan): Madam Speaker, I want to begin my speech with a brief historical overview. In 1946, with the RCMP's increased responsibilities for security, the personnel assigned to security tasks as, for the first time, separated organizationally from the Investigations Directorate and grouped in the Special "I" Branch.

In 1956, the Special "I" Branch was made a directorate within the RCMP, under the command of a deputy commissioner.

• (1220)

In 1969, the Royal Commission on Security recommended the establishment of a civilian security agency. The government rejected this recommendation but announced its intention to give the Special "I" Branch a separate status and to increase its civilian personnel.

Between 1971 and 1974, especially but not exclusively in Quebec, the security service mounted a series of operations, many of which were apparently illegal, in order to neutralize radical and separatist groups.

On March 27, 1975, the federal Cabinet produced a directive governing the security service's activities; this directive remained secret until 1978.

In 1976, a year later, Corporal Samson was tried following an incident unrelated to this affair, but revealed his participation in Operation Bricole in 1972. This operation involved breaking and entering and stealing files, especially on politics in Quebec.

Various events occurred over the years, but let us go to November 29, 1984. The members of SIRC, the Security Intelligence Review Committee, were appointed. The chairman was Ronald Atkey, a former Conservative Cabinet minister, as if by chance.

In February 1985, the federal government's budget estimates showed that CSIS, the Canadian Security Intelligence Service, had a meagre budget of about \$115 million; I say meagre because today its budget exceeds \$200 million. This still represents, in the midst of an economic crisis, a considerable amount.