

*Government Orders*

extradition activities in relation to individuals suspected of having committed war crimes or crimes against humanity.

• (1115)

The existing OAS and RPC legislation does not allow us to disclose privileged information, unless the person in question has been charged formally. Regarding unemployment insurance, the present legislation prohibits the disclosure of certain information, but does not prescribe the type of information that can be released in other instances to facilitate investigations.

The amendments contained in this bill will standardize the circumstances under which information can be communicated to the RCMP regarding the three programs I mentioned.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to draw your attention to the fact that, with the new legislation, the Commissioner of the RCMP, the Minister of Justice and the Attorney General of Canada are the three persons to whom the information could be made available. It would be strictly forbidden, under any circumstances, to disclose information concerning any beneficiary to a foreign organization.

In 1985, the federal government instituted the Commission of Inquiry on War Criminals, presided by the hon. Justice Deschênes. The commission tabled its report in the House of Commons in March of 1987. It recommended that the RCMP and the Department of Justice work together to investigate war crimes that were said to have been committed between 1939 and 1945, that is to say during the last World War.

The report also contained a list of people presumed to be war criminals living in Canada. Both the RCMP and the Department of Justice worked hard to find and charge these people. Unfortunately, this was no easy task. Despite the considerable resources invested by Canada and 17 other countries, the RCMP was unable to find many of those suspected of war crimes or crimes against humanity. The lack of information is, of course, the main reason behind this lack of success.

Furthermore, efforts to obtain relevant information overseas were compromised since the information was destroyed. Although such information exists in Canada, it is more often than not impossible to access because of the restrictions imposed, not to make war criminals untouchable but to protect the legitimate rights of honest Canadians.

[English]

Given the age of the individuals in question, the clientele of the OAS and the CPP programs, the databases for these programs are clearly a valuable source of information for locating and identifying persons alleged to have committed war crimes. A first step toward providing access to this information was taken in 1992 when the legislation for OAS and CPP was

amended to allow the release of confidential information where a criminal charge had been laid.

However the loosening up of the existing restrictions did not prove to be all that helpful to investigators since a charge cannot be laid if the RCMP is not certain that the suspect is in fact a war criminal. Unfortunately the needed information to establish this can only be released after a charge has been laid.

There are two types of information belonging to the unemployment insurance program which could be of value to investigators. The first type is the information given by the persons receiving unemployment insurance benefits. Given the ages of the suspected war criminals few of them are likely to still be in the labour force let alone collecting unemployment insurance. However, there may be exceptions and providing the RCMP access to UI client information could in fact provide the missing link needed in a few cases.

This type of information will be of valuable assistance in the investigation of modern war crimes and crimes against humanity. As well it would mean that all beneficiary information under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Human Resources Development would be treated in essentially the same way for war crimes investigations.

• (1120)

It is also important to emphasize that providing access to client information in this one instance does not mean the government is taking its responsibility to safeguard client information any less seriously. OAS, CPP and UI privacy provisions have always been deliberately restrictive because of the nature of the information collected. Public servants who administer these programs are required to collect personal information from millions of Canadians in order to manage these programs.

**Mr. Silye:** Mr. Speaker, on a point of order. This is a very important debate, so I would like to call a quorum please.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger):** I see a quorum. Resuming debate.

**Mr. Gagnon:** Mr. Speaker, this is indeed a very important debate. I should also advise hon. members opposite that this government takes its work very seriously. I am also informed there are 15 committees taking place today on a variety of subjects.

I would like to continue my speech.

**An hon. member:** We want your views.

**Mr. Gagnon:** I will give you some views later on.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger):** Order. With the greatest respect to all my colleagues on both sides of the House, please direct all your interventions through the Chair so that we might