

Supply

Mr. Gray: Madam Speaker, I appreciate the hon. member's comments. I want to make clear that the legal advice I will seek cannot be limited to those comments, no matter how useful or well-intended.

The hon. member says that certain legislation is outdated. I suppose she is talking about the Official Secrets Act. That may be the case but since that legislation is passed by Parliament I cannot ignore it, whatever my personal views about the relevance of the legislation today.

That is why I have to seek appropriate legal advice from law officers of the crown with respect to how far I can go in releasing the SIRC report and with respect to responding to any relevant legislation. I want to be very open minded and forthcoming, but as I said I am not in a position to ignore the relevant laws on this matter as adopted by Parliament.

Certainly the work of the subcommittee can be very useful. I cannot say what the committee should be doing but perhaps at some point it may want to carry out a review of the relevance of the current provisions of the Official Secrets Act.

However, all of us in this House are still bound by the relevant legislation on this matter which has been passed by this House and Parliament as a whole. All of us have to take that into account in our activities.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel Bellehumeur (Berthier—Montcalm): Madam Speaker, I think the Solicitor General does not understand the object of the request made by the Official Opposition. The request for a royal commission of inquiry in this case is not just a whim.

If you look back over past events, you see that so far we have had the McDonald Commission and the MacKenzie Commission, which were both Royal Commissions of Inquiry. Meanwhile, some joint committees have examined the issue of national security. But the only reports Parliament has followed up on are those of the McDonald and the MacKenzie Royal Commissions. Parliament has always ignored the reports tabled by the joint committees, except to implement two or three minor and watered-down recommendations to amend the legislation.

A royal commission of inquiry would help us to clarify the whole situation and might even prove to be in the interest of the Canadian Security Intelligence Service, which is increasingly losing its credibility in the mind of the Canadian taxpayers.

As Solicitor General, you seem to trust SIRC completely. Then, tell me why SIRC is not aware of the allegations recently published in the newspapers, as you put it? Because these allegations relate to events which happened during 1990 and 1991. We are now in 1994—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Maheu): Order. I am sorry to interrupt the hon. member, but he undoubtedly knows that

questions must be put to the Chair. Members cannot directly ask questions to the minister concerned. The minister may answer the question.

[*English*]

Mr. Gray: Madam Speaker, the McDonald royal commission was created to do its work at a time when there was no equivalent of the Security Intelligence Review Committee. The security service of the RCMP did not operate within a specific legal framework as does the Canadian Security Intelligence Service and there was no mechanism for oversight or review. At that time something had to be set up to carry out the kind of work that SIRC is now mandated to do under the relevant legislation. It was a very different situation.

Now we have a civilian security service that was created specifically by Parliament and which has a specific mandate and authority. It has limitations. For example it cannot look into matters involving lawful dissent; it cannot look into lawful advocacy, protest or dissent. This is clearly set out in the law.

• (1125)

We are dealing with a very different situation today. The experience of the McDonald commission is not relevant. As I said, it related to a time when there was no civilian security service operating in a specific legal framework with an oversight system as we have now.

Finally, the hon. member asked me whether SIRC was seized with certain allegations. Since SIRC is a body independent from me, I am not in a position to comment.

I conclude by saying I am continuously amazed by the interest of Bloc members in anything with the word royal connected to it and in having a royal body set up. Perhaps they should check with Mr. Parizeau who could possibly be very upset to see the interest of the Bloc in this House in relying on and calling for a royal commission.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel Bellehumeur (Berthier—Montcalm): Madam Speaker, I am very pleased to speak on the motion put forward by the Bloc Quebecois today because I think that it is imperative that we have such a debate. The question we must ask ourselves is why we are now requesting a royal commission of inquiry on the activities of the Canadian Security Intelligence Service.

I use the term royal commission of inquiry not because I am a royalist, but because I have to use the tools made available to us by this Parliament. Moreover, I would like you, Madam Speaker, to assure the Solicitor General that in an independent Quebec, we will not call such a body a royal commission of inquiry, but rather a state commission, a commission of inquiry of the sovereign state of Quebec.