

Social Insurance Numbers

That question was answered as follows:

The proposed registration of all Canadians has no connection with the current planning activities of the emergency measures organization. It has been developed solely in connection with social security programs.

We know what happened subsequently with regard to the records of the income tax department and the access that the RCMP subsequently had to that information as a direct result of an agreement between two departments. That is a record the government should have touched on, and I expect that perhaps the minister might have mentioned what occurred with regard to that. I know he certainly was opposed to that and I think he made statements in the House and was somewhat active in trying to end that kind of arrangement. But what a violation it is of the undertakings that were given to the House when we commenced use of the SIN. The risk comes in the slow erosion of liberty in very small steps. Once liberty is taken away, it does not return because the public begins to accept the loss of that privacy as the norm, and therefore there is no great public pressure upon the legislature to restore traditional rights of privacy.

● (1632)

Not only was the number to be limited to social security. On April 8, 1964, the right hon. member for Prince Albert (Mr. Diefenbaker) referred to the social insurance number and suggested that it would be used for many things. He said, "Oh; income tax, and so on?" That was the question he put to the honourable Lester Pearson at that time. The answer which Mr. Pearson gave was an emphatic "Certainly not". We know the number went on to be used regarding income tax.

As the use of that number increases and as our technology increases, we wind up with a capacity to compile all that information and put it in a data bank. Then it becomes very lucrative information. The trend exists already in terms of motor vehicle records. Provincial governments now sell their motor vehicle records. It is a nice revenue producer. The result is that private industry knows who owns motor vehicles, what kind of motor vehicles they are, and therefore they are able to use their subliminal advertising to reach their target groups through mailing. Suddenly the sales resistance one should have, if one has the information and is acting independently, is taken away. That is an erosion of freedom.

I would not doubt that the Conservative party's excellent campaign of fund raising, in which letters were sent across the country, has a computer somewhere in the background attempting to find voters who will be susceptible to sending the party some money in a moment of weakness. Also that is an erosion of freedom. It is an erosion of the right to make independent decisions.

It is interesting to look at the actual horror stories regarding SIN. I should like to refer to the excellent study on privacy and computers which was conducted in 1972. At page 88 it reads:

It is interesting to note that until 1967 all Eskimos in the Yukon and Northwest Territories were identified by numbers imprinted on tags worn around the neck. Not surprisingly the Eskimos objected to the system and, in

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preparation for its abandonment, during the four years from 1967 to 1971 the Eskimos selected their own surnames which are now used in lieu of numbers.

Can one imagine a law which requires native Eskimos to wear numbers around their necks? Of course that law has been changed; but it would not be changed if people did not stand up in the House like King Canute because of these trends and tendencies to register some objection to the continuing erosion of freedom and privacy in both the public and private sectors of Canada.

This motion is a very positive one in a special way. It suggests the introduction of legislation establishing guidelines and limitations upon the use of social insurance numbers. I should like to suggest how we can look at privacy legislation with a view to improving the right to privacy and limiting the use of that number. I see no reason why the police forces of Canada should not be required to appear before a judge in order to show cause as to why they need access to this particular information. This procedure should be on warrant.

I believe the same should also be required of other government agencies. They should not be allowed, as a right, to peer into a person's background for some bureaucratic reason, even if it is more efficient and a method of saving money. All other government agencies, except those directly dealing with social insurance numbers, should be forbidden access to SIN-related information on the ground that it is confidential.

The original law respecting SIN said nothing about private organizations demanding social insurance numbers from clients, customers or members. When someone wants to cash a cheque and the person behind the counter says, "We require your social insurance number", there should be some law protecting that person from providing the massive amount of information backed up by SIN. Perhaps we could forbid private organizations from demanding SIN.

It is worth considering denying the Department of National Revenue the right to use SIN. The use of SIN by the Department of National Revenue perhaps has been the most dangerous invasion of privacy which man has seen in this century. That department's use of SIN does not merely provide snippets of information. It provides almost everything there is to know about an individual. I am not afraid of making any level of bureaucracy work a little harder. Perhaps it will not be as efficient, but the advantages in terms of privacy would be very substantial. The advantages of denying SIN to the Department of National Revenue would put that department where it belongs, completely separate and not working in co-operation with any other department of the government. It would eliminate this nonsensical agreement between the Department of National Revenue and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police providing information and a method of cross-checking. I believe my suggestions would be of some benefit regarding the use of SIN.

Another area to which serious consideration should be given is the amazing clout an employer has over an employee if the employer has access to social insurance numbers and is able to tune in to the background information. In the circumstance where the employer has access to confidential information,