

*Archives of Canada**[English]*

—small blemishes on an otherwise excellent bill, but why not press for perfection?

[Translation]

Mr. Speaker, I believe that the support received for this Bill is very satisfactory. I hope the House will very shortly refer Bill C-95 to committee, so that users of the services of the Public Archives of Canada—academics, journalists, genealogists, legal experts, film producers and archivists—will be able to show what parts could be improved, and a date can be set for adoption of this Bill.

Mr. Speaker, in concluding, I wish to invite my colleagues on both sides of the House to support this urgently needed legislation and thus serve the interests of the Government and the Canadian people.

First of all, new legislation is necessary to clarify the mandate of the Public Archives regarding the necessary destruction of an enormous mass of records (more than 95 per cent of the records produced by Government agencies) and the identification and subsequent transfer, conservation and accessibility of the remainder, judged to be of permanent value and constituting the “memory” of the Government and the Canadian people. It is also necessary to improve the Government’s management procedures, to reduce administration costs throughout the departments and to preserve for future generations a legacy we believe it is essential to transmit to them, regarding our time and our past. It is also necessary to provide an economic means of storing the semi-active government records for a limited time, prior to their destruction or transfer to the historical archives.

I think we all agree it is important for the Government to have a central and permanent depository for records, so that we can follow the evolution and decision-making process of the various Government departments, and thus understand the past, our present problems and future challenges. Furthermore, the Government must respect the law and provide Canadians with information requested under the access to information and privacy legislation. The Archives offer all these services and do so economically by providing a central location for accessing these records.

Perhaps I may broaden my perspective to include all Canadians. Everywhere in Canada, people are now talking about cultural sovereignty, closer economic relations with the United States, and so forth. Actually, the new act will enable the Public Archives to play a still more decisive role in the understanding and development of our cultural identity. This country has been enriched by diverse contributions from every continent and every culture. Bilingualism, multiculturalism, the parliamentary system, public institutions, respect for various customs, the rights of native peoples, those and others are features that make us Canadians different from other nations.

The same is true of the extraordinarily complex network of communications this country has built up over two centuries, despite barriers that seemed insuperable. That saga, the word

is not too strong, should fill every Canadian with excitement and pride.

With an increased access to their archives, Canadians will be able to better understand the richness of their past and of their present challenges. This is why today I am suggesting that we improve our collective “memory”, widen our perspective of the Canadian experience, encourage the development of the Canadian Archives, with among other things a more appropriate legislation and a Canadian system of archives which alone will make this whole heritage available to Canadians. With this legislation, it is my hope that we will not only be consolidating our achievements, but also providing the infrastructures needed for preserving and making available those archives to researchers and the entire population as a unique cultural resource that is the true image of Canada.

● (1320)

[English]

Mrs. Sheila Finestone (Mount Royal): Mr. Speaker, at the outset I would like to congratulate the Minister of Communications (Mr. Masse) for a very warm, thoughtful and well presented perspective on the reasoning for the need for the new archives Bill. When you look at and read the old Bill from 1912, with its very few narrow paragraphs, you realize the urgency and can respect his observations in this regard, notwithstanding the need for the open hearings of our committee so we can make the changes necessary due to the slight, but serious imperfections we find in this Bill.

Mr. Speaker, that being said I am pleased today to rise to speak to Bill C-95, an Act respecting the Archives of Canada and the records of government institutions of Canada and to amend the Copyright Act on second reading.

The Archives of Canada Act would replace the present Public Archives Act, which dates back to 1912. Since 1912 the Public Archives of Canada has freely interpreted the single unrevised statement of its mandate or mission, that is, to collect and preserve historical material of every kind, nature and description as authority for its contemporary activities. These activities should now be more authoritatively defined in a complete revision of the Public Archives of Canada Act, which not only reflects the scope of its current archival collections and the methods of their preservation, but also other duties and activities in which the Public Archives now is involved.

The Public Archives is a vital heritage custodial institution similar in purpose to the National Museums of Canada. The importance of archives was admirably delineated in a brief to the Applebaum-Hébert committee by the Public Archives, and I quote from that brief:

If the archives of a nation, a Government or an organization are not preserved, then the history of that nation, Government or organization will be forgotten, and the price which a people pay for the loss of their history is a misunderstanding of their roots, a confusion in their identity and the misrepresentation of the nature of their country.