

*Canadian Citizen Identification Cards*

proof of qualifications. The identification of the applicant is secondary to the prime object of the request, and the value of the card, for identification purposes, is usually rather negligible. The statements of the applicant are checked only where circumstances warrant it and the identity of the individual is rarely checked. It is therefore possible to commit acts of fraud or make false statements, and numerous documents can be produced in support of a false identity. Of course, most documents issued are based on accurate information, but the fact that some documents are not hurts the reputation of the system, in that the credibility of authentic documents is sometimes questioned.

Administrative needs require of an individual that he supply descriptive information repeatedly in the preparation of those documents. The information thus collected for various purposes have some common points and most details could be used in each case. That process which is repeated at all levels of government and in various organizations and corporations periodically gives rise to vexations and disadvantages for the citizen and creates administrative problems, since it increases efforts and lost time.

As a rule at least, the creation of a single organization, evidently coming under federal jurisdiction and having the responsibility for issuing identity cards to all, could cope with those difficulties. It would thus be possible to issue to a citizen reaching a specific age or to an immigrant at the time of his admittance in the country an identity card whose validity is guaranteed. Furthermore, I think that the situation would be improved generally if, on the one hand, a government body were responsible for the issuance of identity cards to persons applying for them, and if, on the other hand, the value of information so collected were acknowledged when other documents would have to be issued.

I have good reason to believe that many people would make the point that by compelling someone to do something, one restricts his freedom; generally, such restraints, particularly when used by the government, are unwelcome in a democracy such as ours. Only a few days ago, I was talking to someone who expressed his concern on this matter; in his view, an identity card was an infringement of personal freedom. "One of these days, out of a clear sky," said he, "the police will ask us our address". Of course, the police can obtain very quickly the address of car drivers. Ontario residents are even required to give within six days their address to the authorities.

Of course, we accept this obligation as essential in the general interest and this is part of the price we pay to use highways. However, we want the least possible of such restraints. This raises the following question: Should the identification card, if it is issued by government authorities, be compulsory. Is it necessary to give each and every citizen an identification card, whether he wants it or not? Is it even desirable? Until now I have said that an identification card is useful and that, in general, people have found it valuable in their relations with others outside their immediate surroundings. It is obvious that it represents an economical way of making dealings easier—and not only business transactions—even if it is not essential. Therefore, in my opinion, the individual must decide by himself. If he wants a card, he gets one, and his relations

with the outside world are facilitated to the extent he uses it. On the other hand, if he prefers discretion or individualism to convenience, or if he is reluctant to the idea for any other reason, he will not be forced to have a card. Generally, people think that a system of registration or identification is only effective if it covers every citizen of a country, but I do not agree. Certainly, the more comprehensive it is, the more extended are its benefits; but the benefits that the community and the individuals will derive from it will not in any way be diminished due to the fact that a segment of the population, whether large or small, will not accept it.

While I do not want to compel anybody to participate in such a system, I hesitate to deprive someone from the opportunity of doing so because it would be imprudent or equivalent to waiving personal freedom. Those who are overseeing to the interests of their fellow citizens are sometimes overzealous when it comes to protecting people against their own foolishness or against what they believe, in their superior wisdom, to be foolishness. I do not see anything of the kind here.

My third point, Mr. Speaker, is this: the rights and freedoms of the individuals are adequately safeguarded if participation to a national system of identification is optional. I would add for the skeptical ones, that this system is used at the present time in France, and with success.

From what I have just said, it is obvious that I should also be against the obligation for citizens to carry an identity card on their person or produce it for scrutiny by the authorities. Certainly, should someone have the misfortune to be suspected of an offence of which he is innocent, an identity card might be the means of proving his good faith. Or again, if it were a matter of establishing a right, the holder of a card could resort to it in order to have his right recognized and granted more readily by the proper agency. In fact, those are some of the important purposes the document would clearly serve. But the decision as to whether the card should be carried around in order to enjoy the above-mentioned advantages should be left to the entire discretion of the individual. A driver or a pilot has to carry a permit attesting his ability to handle the vehicle for which he is responsible, a measure essential for the protection of the public. However, I see no parallel between a citizen going about his own business and the holder of an identity card, and certainly no reason to force him to produce such card like a schoolboy answering roll-call.

• (4:40 p.m.)

Since the system of national identification cards is often associated with storage into a computer of particulars about an individual, I deem it advisable to insist upon the very obvious fact that these are two quite different matters. It seems to me that the abuses which are sometimes associated with the use of computers in this field cannot arise as far as the identification cards are concerned if we consider the kind of information that will be found on them. It is obvious that such information is not of a private nature and I cannot imagine any conceivable situation in which information about professional ability or other subjective appreciations of all sorts would appear on such a document.

[Mr. Béchard.]