

● (1650)

I am particularly concerned, Mr. Speaker—and it was mentioned earlier by the Hon. Member for Mississauga South (Mr. Blenkarn)—with the question of what is detrimental to the interests of Canada. I believe that has to do with the clause on domestic subversion. Who defines the interests of Canada, Mr. Speaker? We are here every day debating what constitutes the interests of Canada. Many of these so-called political and security questions over the years have been questions of whose economic interests are at stake. Anyone who has taken any time at all or made any effort to study history knows that what has sometimes been elevated to the category of “interests of the nation” or the interests of a particular country, or, for that matter, the interests of a particular alliance, has really been the economic interests of powerful groups within that particular country, that particular nation or that particular group of countries. Therefore, it frightens me, Mr. Speaker, to think that we could have so general a definition of what this new security service is instructed to concern itself with. Determining what is “detrimental to the interests of Canada” surely is what the political exercise in this country is all about. We have a wide variety of views as to what constitutes the “interests of Canada”. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, we have missed a wonderful opportunity here. I must say I am not surprised that we missed it but I am deeply disappointed, because what we have here is a confirmation of the fact that this Government is not particularly enlightened or concerned about civil liberties. It is not particularly concerned about parliamentary accountability. It has not seized the opportunity to do the kind of things which we could have done. If there had been the will on both sides of the House to do a good job, we could have made Canada into an example to the rest of the world of how to conduct the admittedly necessary business of protecting the security of one's country, but we could have done it in such a way as to eliminate as much as possible the possibility of anyone being unnecessarily harassed, watched or investigated. We missed that opportunity, Mr. Speaker. I can only say that I hope many Canadians share my disappointment and I hope that not too far in the future we will have the opportunity to review the whole thing.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Herbert): Debate.

Mr. Lorne Nystrom (Yorkton-Melville): Mr. Speaker, I also want to say a few words on this particular clause of Bill C-9 which is before the House today. I am concerned about the tremendous discretion which the definitions allow the new security service when it comes to defining what “threats to the security of Canada” means.

I notice, Mr. Speaker, there was an excellent comment made about that subject by the Hon. Member for Burnaby (Mr. Robinson) when he spoke in committee on December 6. Perhaps I will repeat it for the House because the Hon. Member really summed up our position well.

Security Intelligence Service

[Translation]

He said:

Mr. Chairman, on Clause 2, clearly the relevant and the most important provisions in Clause 2 are the provisions containing the definition *threats to the security of Canada*, because it is on the basis of the definition of *threats to the security of Canada* that all other activities of the Canadian Security Intelligence Service flow; that is, other than the secondary mandate, the mandate with respect to security assessment and the mandate with respect to foreign intelligence.

He went on to say, Mr. Speaker:

In my view the definition of “threats to the security of Canada” in this legislation is dangerously drawn up and would permit, furthermore, the targeting of either groups or individuals within Canada that are seeking to support groups outside Canada that are trying to achieve political objectives; trying to overthrow, in a number of instances, repressive military dictatorships. Under the provisions of this legislation as it is worded, Mr. Chairman, under the definition of “threats to the security of Canada”, as witness after witness has submitted to the committee, this would effectively permit the service, at its discretion, to target peace activists, church groups that support liberation movements in Central America; to target political organizations or the labour movement when they send funds in support of the African National Congress in South Africa.

[English]

I believe that that definition of the sweeping powers given to the new security service for those kinds of activities really sums up the feelings which a lot of Hon. Members have about the definition of words like “subversion”. I know from experience that many peace groups, for example, might be under surveillance because someone in the security service may think that they are on the wrong side of the political fence, or that what they are doing might not be good for the Government of the day, and so on. I also know from experience that in many democratic countries, including our own, many of the church activists are often under surveillance because of some of their activities. As I have already mentioned, groups in this country which are raising funds for certain liberation movements in different parts of the world, and so on, are sometimes under surveillance because the Government of the day might not agree with that kind of activity. Therefore, I am concerned about this provision, Mr. Speaker. I hope that for those reasons this Bill will be amended so that the definition of “subversion” and other definitions are made much more restrictive.

We are, obviously, Mr. Speaker, not the only people who are concerned about this. There has been a general clamour across the country from many different groups that too much power will be given to this particular security service. For example, the Canadian Council of Churches, which is a group of some 12 Canadian churches which voluntarily co-operate through its agencies on matters of economic and social concern, are also very concerned about the breadth and sweeping nature of the security Bill which is before the House today. The Canadian Council of Churches includes the Anglican Church, the Baptist Church, the Lutheran Church, the Greek Orthodox Church, the United Church and many other churches which have banded together to express their great concern about the sweeping nature of this Bill. I believe we should take their point of view into consideration, and that should be one reason at least why this Bill should be radically amended.