

Official Secrets Act

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Stand by unanimous consent. Item no. 12, the hon. member for Prince Albert (Mr. Hovdebo). Shall the item stand?

Some hon. Members: Stand.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: By unanimous consent.

Item No. 14, the hon. member for Lévis (Mr. Guay). Shall the item stand?

Some hon. Members: Stand.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: By unanimous consent.

* * *

OFFICIAL SECRETS ACT

REFERENCE OF CONTENTS TO STANDING COMMITTEE

Mr. Albert Cooper (Peace River) moved:

That the Standing Committee on Justice and Legal Affairs be empowered to study the contents of the Official Secrets Act and to recommend any changes that the committee deems necessary, in order that the act would be limited in its application to enemy espionage and offences to national security.

He said: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As indicated in the notice of motion, it should be obvious to some that the purpose of this motion is to revive a motion of a similar nature made in this House by my predecessor, the Hon. Gerald W. Baldwin, one of this nation's greatest champions of human rights. Mr. Baldwin, as I understand it, is now happily retired. I am sure he is watching us all very closely to make sure we do not let this motion get talked out, but will let it proceed uninhibited.

You will notice, Mr. Speaker, that unlike my predecessor's motion, my motion does not attempt to restrict the government's claim of Crown privilege in committee. Thus, I fail to see any reason why the government should not support this motion. All it asks is merely that the Official Secrets Act be studied with great care by the committee. There can be no harm in that, only a great deal of good.

I am confident all members on both sides of the House will support this motion in the same way as they supported the motion by Mr. Baldwin. I was not in the House the last time around, but now I and other newly elected members have the opportunity of showing our support for this badly needed public scrutiny of the Official Secrets Act.

I sincerely hope the Right Hon. Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) will once again show his support for this cause for which Mr. Baldwin struggled so long. It would indeed be fitting if today the House passed this motion, almost exactly one year since Mr. Baldwin moved his motion under Standing Order 43. It would, I feel, be a great gesture of respect and admiration for the many years Mr. Baldwin devoted to this place. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, I am asking hon. members to unanimously support this motion since doing so will result in a great step toward alleviating this nation of a 69-year old pain in the democratic neck.

I have recently been informed that the Department of Justice is presently reviewing this antiquated act. We in this House are all happy to hear it, but that should in no way constitute a reason for this House not passing my motion. We must act now, and since the Department of Justice is studying the matter I hope its officers will provide their full co-operation to the committee.

I hope the Prime Minister will again see the light as he did one year ago. I hope the government will not deny the people of this country the opportunity to take this legislation out of the justice department's dark and mysterious secret closets.

At this point I suppose I should begin to speak at length on the precise reasons for which this act is such an inherent evil contained within our statutes, but I feel we all know and have witnessed the detrimental results which occur when citizens have been prosecuted under it.

We all watched with disbelief as one of this nation's respected daily newspapers, *The Toronto Sun*, was prosecuted for merely carrying out its duty to the public. We stood aghast while good Canadian citizens such as Peter Treu were being stripped of their rights, and while people were being told they did not even have the right to a public trial. Today we sit and wonder why it has taken a decade, ten long, frustrating years, for the people whose rights were violated, for the truth about the October crisis, to begin to trickle out from the cracks of bureaucratic secrecy in the name of national security. Some 650 people were arrested during that nightmare in 1970—650 reasons why the Official Secrets Act must be reviewed.

I should mention that this is the first time I have risen in this House to speak. It is indeed a great honour for me and I look forward to the years ahead during which I hope I will do this place honour by upholding its many fine traditions. I should very much like to speak at length about the constituency of Peace River, explaining to you, Mr. Speaker, what makes the land of the mighty Peace such a glorious place to grow up in and such a beautiful place to grow old in. However, I am afraid I do not feel it appropriate that I go into that now. I feel it is more important to tell this House through you, Mr. Speaker, of the deeply felt concern and anxiety the people of the Peace River constituency are conveying to me at the present time. The people of Peace River, of Grande Prairie, of Valleyview, the people of all the towns, villages and hamlets, the native peoples, the people who work the land in order that the rest of the nation may put bread on its tables, the people who work 12 and 16-hour shifts seven days a week on the drilling rigs in order that the rest of the nation may be able to keep its houses warm in the winter, its food hot and its cars running; all the people of Peace River from all walks of life are worried. Their worries are increasing daily.

Does the Prime Minister know why they are worried? Does the Minister of Justice and Minister of State for Social Development (Mr. Chrétien) know why they are worried? Does the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources (Mr. Lalonde) know why they are worried? I do not think they know; it is their job to know but they do not, and I suggest they do not because they do not want to know.