

Fair Credit Reporting Act

member for Vaudreuil in Quebec. This question is Canada-wide in its application and should be dealt with by the federal parliament through the Department of Consumer and Corporate Affairs.

I hope that legislation covering this credit aspect will be introduced before very long. The problem is getting more and more serious as devices for invading privacy become more and more diverse and embarrassing. While my hon. friend may say that all privacy has gone, there are people who have managed to keep a few shreds of it and they would like to be able to maintain that position. I very much hope this bill will be given second reading and referred to the standing committee to be examined at leisure and in depth. This is something for which many of us have been pressing for a good many years.

Mr. Ron Atkey (St. Paul's): Mr. Speaker, as a new member in this House, and having a passing interest in the field of privacy, I was delighted early in the session when I noted the bill before us today, Bill C-49, standing in the name of the hon. member for St. John's East (Mr. McGrath). Indeed, I think I can say this is one of the most sophisticated pieces of legislation in the field of privacy that we have seen this session. It is to the credit of that hon. member that this bill should come before the House to be debated today and perhaps referred to a standing committee for further consideration.

Three years ago the Standing Committee on Justice and Legal Affairs made a few passing references to problems of the sort that are dealt with in this bill. They referred to the interprovincial and international flow of personal information through telecommunication facilities linking computers with central data banks. They pointed out that no new development in trade and commerce has ever had more need for or been less subjected to regulation than the private data being programmed into and transmitted by such systems.

The government of Canada, to its credit, in April, 1971, commissioned a task force on privacy and computers which dealt with many of the considerations which have been discussed in this debate. There is a great deal of valuable information as to existing operations in the private sector and in the government of Canada. As I pointed out on Tuesday of this week, that report went a long way to alerting Canadians to many of the dangers, not only in the credit field but in other fields, of applied computer uses; existing and potential dangers and threats to the individual privacy of millions of Canadians.

In response to comments by a number of members the other night about the work that has yet to be done in the field of privacy, the Minister of Justice (Mr. Lang) gave some indication of government support. I wish to quote briefly from his words as reported at page 8406 of *Hansard*:

But I do anticipate us coming forward with additional measures, both in relation to computers and in other ways, to further protect individual privacy in this country . . .

We must move to meet these advances and techniques in our time. We are doing so at this particular time in respect of the devices for intrusion related to the conversations of individuals. We will do so step by step and without delay with regard to other areas. It was for this reason that we commissioned the study on privacy and computers, and followed it up with action inside the government to determine how we could most effectively carry out

[Mrs. MacInnis (Vancouver Kingsway).]

the recommendations or suggestions which are implicit in the work which went on in producing that report.

Here are the key words:

The House will before long see the fruits of some of that labour, and with that we will continue to do what we are doing in respect of this bill in protection of privacy.

I can suggest no better place to start than for the government to consider Bill C-49 standing in the name of the hon. member for St. John's East. A few technical problems were pointed out by the hon. member opposite. I do not share so many of his concerns of a constitutional nature. I looked at some of the problems in that field. I think this could provide a good starting point for work in the standing committee. One of the great problems in approaching this field of attempting to alert Canadians to the dangers is to assist them in appreciating what we are talking about when we deal with the right to privacy. The right to privacy is perhaps accepted by many members of the House as a substantive legal right, yet in non-lawyers' language what does it really mean? I think the task force on computers and privacy came close to coming to grips with that question. The task force said:

● (1750)

Thus, the claim to privacy, as we know it, is eminently a phenomenon of the industrial and postindustrial age in which the exigencies of urban life have led to an atomic concept of society in place of the earlier organic model. Formerly, in moving from the country to the city, physical solitude was traded for anonymity. The exchange is increasingly nullified and anonymity is compromised by the spread of information systems and networks while solitude in cities has been largely lost. Moreover, the process is one way: institutions learn more about individuals, but individuals learn no more about the institutions, or even about what the institutions learn about them.

To put that in simple language, Canadians fear the powers of mass surveillance which large corporations can exercise through the use of computers. They fear this power because they do not have access to it and they do not understand it. In a recent book entitled "Private Lives and Public Surveillance", the author, Mr. James B. Rule, referred to this question of the invasion of privacy particularly in the consumer credit field. He used the term "mass surveillance" as an appropriate one to typify the view most people have of the use of computers in that field. In describing mass surveillance and human repression, he said this:

If the erosion of personal privacy represents, for most people, one of unpleasant consequences of mass surveillance, then the abridgement of personal freedom represents the other. People instinctively feel that the appetite of corporate agencies for personal data is not simply whimsical. They feel rather that information so collected is apt to bear on subsequent decision-making, and that such decision-making may work to their disadvantage. The case studies have shown that these perceptions are quite correct, at least as far as they go. The question is: has this inquiry also revealed an over-all trend toward totalitarian repressiveness in the model of "1984"?

I would answer that question in the affirmative. I was interested to note the reference by the hon. member for St. John's East to the experience of a young businessman who later became a law student and then a lawyer in Sarnia, Ontario. This young man, Mr. Bruce McGrath, was a law student of mine and I had occasion to spend many hours with him on a personal basis discussing his situation, one