

Access to Information

assessment department of the Region of Peel and that if they would tell me, then it was fine, but the minister would not tell me. In effect, the minister would supply the information to a municipal department of the government of Ontario, but he would not supply that information to a member of Parliament. So here we have a lease on which a company is paying rent to the Government of Canada for the use of Crown property, the Crown is negotiating a lease on the abutting property to another person, and it is impossible to find out the terms of the lease on the abutting property.

It turns out that the rent being charged to Port Credit Harbour Marine is significantly less on a square footage basis, a building value basis, an anchorage basis or any other basis than the rent which the Port Credit Yacht Club is being asked to pay. The rent which the Port Credit Yacht Club is being asked to pay is higher than the rent paid by any yacht club in the entire greater Toronto area. Indeed, the rent is three times the rent on a mooring basis or a square footage basis than the rent paid by the RCYC, perhaps the richest yacht club in all of Ontario or indeed, Canada.

The facts and figures upon which rent is determined, upon which a fair lease is arranged and upon which the ministry relies are withheld simply because, I presume, the information would not back the government's claim with respect to a negotiable fair rent. That is wrong. I expect that on the passage of this act the government will be obligated to supply the information.

I am bothered by the cost to the bureaucracy involved in scanning requests for information to make sure that those requests are not of the class and kind prohibited under the bill. I say again, if we did not have the situation where governments have refused to come clean and be fair to the citizens of Canada, we would not need this bill. But because governments for some time now have refused to be open and above board, we are required to organize a bureaucracy to judge and arbitrate on whether a piece of information can be released.

If one really believes that our democratic representative system is worth while, one would expect the government at least to have the belief that members of Parliament are trustworthy and that if a constituent has a need which the government can fulfil, the member of Parliament could get the information, if it is possible, and thereby solve the matter. Because of the refusal of the ministries to be above board, open and free with members of Parliament and with people, we must introduce a bill which—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ethier): Order, please. It being six o'clock, I do now leave the chair until eight o'clock p.m.

At six o'clock the House took recess.

AFTER RECESS

The House resumed at 8 p.m.

Mr. W. Kenneth Robinson (Etobicoke-Lakeshore): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased indeed that at long last there is before the House of Commons Bill C-43 dealing with freedom of information and the right to privacy. This matter has had a rather checkered career going back as far as the days of Barry Mather, the former member for Surrey-White Rock, who brought in a private member's bill. That was followed by a bill brought in by the former member for Peace River, Mr. Ged Baldwin. They were the forerunners of freedom of information in Canada.

Following those two private members' bills in June, 1977, a green paper entitled "Legislation on Public Access to Government Documents" was tabled by the then secretary of state, now the Minister of State for Science and Technology and the Minister of the Environment (Mr. Roberts). The Standing Joint Committee on Regulations and other Statutory Instruments reported on the green paper.

Senator E. A. Forsey was joint chairman of the drafting committee. He is now retired from the Senate. The other joint chairman was Gerald W. Baldwin, the former member of Parliament for Peace River, now retired. Senator J. M. Godfrey is still in the other place. Mr. Andrew Brewin, formerly the member of Parliament for Greenwood, is now retired. I was the fifth member of the committee.

Next came Bill C-535, a privacy bill presented by the hon. member for Wellington-Dufferin-Simcoe (Mr. Beatty). He spoke on this matter today and expressed considerable concern about the use of social insurance numbers by the federal government and the fact that there is no mention of this practice in Bill C-43. I point out to him that the study of the use of social insurance numbers was commissioned by the privacy commissioner and was extended to May, 1980, and was to include a study of the use of social insurance numbers by the federal government. The hon. member will recall that the matter was initiated by the Conservative minister of justice in the last Parliament.

Obviously, to include specific provisions dealing with social insurance numbers in this legislation would prejudice the findings of the privacy commissioner. However, it is understood that the general provisions in the bill dealing with the collection, use and dissemination of personal information by the federal government will apply to social insurance numbers, and this will accomplish much of what the hon. member for Wellington-Dufferin-Simcoe wanted to achieve.

● (2010)

There are some very important points in Bill C-43. The bill represents a significant development in making our institutions more open and more democratic. This is what it is all about. We call ourselves a democratic nation, and we want to be sure it is democratic in every way. Openness is certainly part of what we are looking at. Canadians will have a powerful tool to gain greater insight into the activities and functions of their government when this bill is put in place. Politicians and civil servants will be more accountable to the Canadian public, and I am sure the Canadian public is quite concerned about this.