

to anyone by the Governor General without express authority of the Colonial Secretary; confidential despatches could be shown to the Cabinet under obligation of secrecy, and the consent of the Colonial Office had to be obtained before any could be published. Some despatches were marked "private" or "most private and confidential"; but that depended on the whim of the Colonial Secretary. Naturally many such despatches were not brought to the knowledge of either the Cabinet or Parliament. If a despatch affected foreign affairs, the consent of the Foreign Office had to be obtained before its contents could be made known.

The Governor General, who knew more about local affairs than the Colonial Secretary, could sometimes use his discretion over withholding information he considered it unwise to divulge. Under responsible government, such official despatches seem almost invariably to have been shown to the Prime Minister and, at the latter's discretion, to the Privy Council, who would decide whether or not they would be shown to the legislature. Laurier declared in the House of Commons that he never had withheld any despatches from his Cabinet colleagues, but it is probable that this statement should be taken cum grano salis. Many of the private or secret communications received by the Governor General were shown to the Prime Minister in strictest confidence.*

* See Chapter 10 on "Debate on the 1909 Bill: Secrecy."