

Information Canada

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Stanfield: To obtain this information, the public must rely basically on the opposition and an informed and energetic press, using the term "press" in the broadest sense of the word.

This is a dangerous proposal. It should not be proceeded with now. The government should try the step of co-ordination at modest expense and indeed see what savings can be made in addition to having a better service. This step should not be taken now, particularly in view of the obvious concentration of authority in the government as opposed to this House and, if I may say so, in the Prime Minister as opposed to the members of his government.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Stanfield: I say that the members of the government must answer questions and we must have solid assurance that the committees of this House really have sufficient independence to be a safeguard. There are no adequate safeguards. There is no way at the present time that the country or this Parliament could stop Information Canada from becoming "Manipulation Canada" any time the government might choose to use it.

Mr. David Lewis (York South): Mr. Speaker, I found the Prime Minister's statement a very disturbing one, both because of what it said and because of what it failed to say. It failed to tell us what information the Prime Minister is speaking about. Are we talking about providing information to the people of Canada and explaining to them the government policies, which is perfectly necessary and desirable, or are we talking about, as I suspect from the statement we have just heard, an agency to control and manage the news the Canadian people will obtain from the government? I cannot help feeling that the super organization, the establishment of which has just been announced, is mainly for the purpose of managing the news emanating from the government and, if I may put it this way, that the agency will operate as a perpetual election campaign for the party in power.

The Prime Minister said that he welcomes the establishment of a parliamentary committee to review the objectives, policies and operations of Information Canada and, not only that, but to review the policies in the various departments. I say to the Prime Minister that if this is a genuine desire, then a

[Mr. Stanfield.]

parliamentary committee should have been set up to discuss the objectives, policies and operations of Information Canada before that agency was formed. Before the Prime Minister made his announcement, the people who have studied this matter and have presented the plan to the government should have appeared before a committee of this House. We should have been given the opportunity to ask them questions to find out exactly what this agency is going to do. The failure of the government to bring it before a committee of the House, and the fact that it has presented us with a *fait accompli*, is precisely one of the things that makes me unhappy and suspicious of the purpose of this super organization.

No one denies that there is a need, as the Glassco report indicated, for co-ordinating the information services of the government. God alone knows that many of them are inefficient and much can be done to improve them. No one denies the need for getting rid of the duplication of staff and equipment that is now to be found in various departments of the government in connection with information services. But there is nothing in this statement that suggests there will be any reduction in the approximately \$200 million now being spent on information services by the departments, only a suggestion that another \$1 million will be added to what is now being spent on a super agency of the sort described.

The Prime Minister makes a great deal of the need to give the people of Canada information and to find out what they think. Permit me to say a word about each of those things. We have given him an opportunity to do that in this House. We took the government at its word that it really meant it when it said that it was in favour of full disclosure of government policies and government thinking. So, we have asked questions during the oral question period; we have placed questions on the Order Paper, and we have placed numerous motions for the production of various papers on the Order Paper of this House. When the government has asked for the production of a study made in order to assist the government to arrive at a policy, almost every time the government has refused to produce those study papers. I say to the Prime Minister that he has had the opportunity to prove to the members of the House and to the people of Canada that this government really means what it says when it talks about full disclosure of information to the people of this country and that he has failed to take advantage of that opportunity.