

Access of Administrative Documents

gon. The documents disclose a good deal of the factual and background information dealing with the acceleration of that war some six or seven years ago. I am talking about the Pentagon papers case. I expect hon. members probably know about it. I do not have to take sides on the merits of it, although I can say this: At the time in question the forces of the United States in viet Nam were quite limited in number. An incident took place known as the Gulf of Tonkin incident. It was made to appear that vessels of the United States of America had been attacked by units of North Viet Nam forces, that damage had been inflicted and casualties caused. Because of that, the Congress of the United States armed the president with power and authority to continue and wage that war, to the extent to which it accelerated over the next few years. That war now appear to be over.

It is quite possible, and it will only be known after the trial has ended, that many of the incidents, many of the factors involved in the incident to do with the Gulf of Tonkin, were fabricated. It now appears possible that many of the incidents and factors involved in the Daniel Ellsberg case were fabricated in order to provide an opportunity for the executive branch of the United States government to vigorously prosecute that war and ultimately send to Viet Nam several hundred thousand members of the armed forces.

• (1730)

I do not want to go into the merits of that case. However, if the documents of the Pentagon which were apparently taken by Daniel Ellsberg and his co-defendants and published in United States newspapers had been within the knowledge of the American people in 1964 and 1965, it is very likely that that conflict would never have reached the stage to which it ultimately grew. Those are the facts. I am not going to pass judgment in advance of the trial because nobody knows what will be its result. However, I have a great deal more respect for the public than most governments have. Governments work themselves into positions of anonymity and secrecy; they have no confidence in the people.

The public may make errors. Sometimes people make mistakes in the members they send to this House. However, in the final analysis the ultimate decision of all the people in the country is a sound, rational and good decision. Such a decision cannot be properly taken unless the public is armed with the facts. Speaking as a Member of Parliament, we do not get many more facts than the public; we do not know all the facts. For that reason I support the proposal of the hon. member and I think all hon. members should support it.

We cannot have good, sound, democratic government unless the public is informed of the facts in issue. Failure to do this causes tragedies such as the Viet Nam war. Possibly a settlement could have been brought about six or seven years ago which would have been not very different from the settlement made recently. Thousands of casualties, countless sorrows and tragedies of war could possibly have been avoided.

I hope that before this parliament with a minority government is concluded serious attention will be given to this very difficult problem. The public has the right to

[Mr. Baldwin.]

know all the connotations and facts in order to make an adequate decision. The public has a right to the facts so that its representatives in this House and in the legislative assemblies are able to proceed under pressure with instructions from constituents who are fully informed. For that reason, Mr. Speaker, I am most happy to support this motion.

[Translation]

Mr. Adrien Lambert (Bellechasse): Mr. Speaker, I should like first of all to congratulate the hon. member who introduced this bill and submitted valid arguments to convince the House of its usefulness.

I am pleased to see that this bill is truly objective, that it wants the public to be well-informed on the different activities of the departments, commissions and boards working under the authority of the Canadian government. However, the bill already makes exceptions which are truly valid since in certain cases it is quite reasonable to have information kept confidential for a better guarantee of the security of our territory, our population and our country.

However, I noted on several occasions that it is really difficult to obtain information that would be very useful to us to enable us to fulfill our responsibilities more effectively vis-à-vis the population that we represent.

Unfortunately, what happens is that information is not always very accurate and I am referring to things that are published, facts that are reported. We had a good sample of this today in this House when an hon. member put a question to the Minister of Transport (Mr. Marchand) and the Minister of Transport in his reply categorically denied being where he was alleged to have been in the news reported in a leading Montreal daily newspaper. So this is what I call bad information. Facts are falsified to incriminate those in power and if the public does not see the other side of the information coming directly from an authorized source, it thinks it is being wronged, treated differently from those who are in a position of authority.

I think that the bill should be passed by this House in order to authorize the government and commissions to publish information when Canadians request it and are interested in getting it. This would certainly be to the advantage of our society.

Mr. Speaker, I listened very closely to the speech given by the hon. member for Peace River (Mr. Baldwin). He quoted very eloquent facts that urge us to support this bill in order to better inform the population.

I can knowledgeably say that the better informed the population is, the easier it becomes for those responsible for the administration and those who are in a position of authority to run the county effectively.

When I was secretary-treasurer in my own community, I often noticed that when the people were informed of the proceedings of the municipal council and when the decisions made by the council were published, the people would co-operate because they knew about the decisions. Conversely when the municipal authorities tried to work in a rather underhanded fashion, many questions were asked and the rate payers were not willing to co-operate with the municipal council because they were not sufficiently informed. I think that if these problems exist at the