

*Science Council*

defence of restriction of information is most distressing, especially coming from a government led by a party which is named "Liberal".

A second and much less significant aspect of the irony is that my doctoral thesis happened to be on John Stuart Mill. Therefore, I know a little about him. I challenge the government spokesman to produce one statement by John Stuart Mill which would in any way support their position. There is not a thing written by Mill which would support the view of the government in seeking to restrict information, and this is really the issue here. In fact the government spokesman would find substantial argumentation in support of the contrary view; that is, that governments above all should be open and that all sources of governmental information should be readily available, not only to the opposition but to the public at large.

It would seem to me that the general reasons that should be accepted in defence of a restriction on information could really be reduced to three. One would be when the security of the state is involved. Even in this case, it has been the practice not only in this Parliament but in others for certain leading members of the opposition parties to have access to certain documents of crucial importance even when state security is at issue. But as a general rule, certainly individual persons in a democratic society would expect that correspondence concerning security matters should not be made public. People have confidence in their democratically elected officials protecting their interests in this respect.

The second area would be one in which disclosure would provide an opportunity for someone to make an improper financial gain. Again, everyone would agree with this. The third area I suppose—and this is the last example which comes to my mind—would be if the document could be considered to be libellous in nature. Beyond these it seems to me the minister has failed to do what he should do. He has failed to provide an argument for the general principle, practised not only of course by this government but by all Parliamentary systems throughout the world, of invoking the general rule of a right to secrecy and a right to request others to gouge out of them any information they can. To say the least, I do not think this is a distinguished aspect of our tradition of Parliamentary government. It is a tradition which now is being challenged. It is being challenged in Canada and in other Parliamentary systems within

[Mr. Broadbent.]

the British Commonwealth. As the minister will know, the system of secrecy has not only been challenged but has been overthrown in Sweden. Contrary to what has been suggested it seems to me the Swedish experience is informative for two reasons.

The first reason is that Sweden has a very distinguished tradition of freedom for its people in all areas of life. Second, it has a very distinguished reputation for providing practical government. In Sweden there has been an attempt to maximize the combination of these two desirable attributes in society, freedom and practicality. I would suggest they have been successful in keeping both these and, at the same time, in providing as a general rule the right of the public to be informed and the requirement that the government must show cause for restricting the publication or distribution of any document. It seems to me that any government, especially a government using the name "liberal", should be acting on this principle and not a contrary one. The suggestion has been made that the reason the Swedes have been able to do this, even though they have a cabinet form of government, is that they operate on the basis of boards much more than we do and keep the separation between administration and policy on a much more rigorous basis than we do in this country.

I do not think it is a persuasive argument to just state those facts in supporting the government's cause. Surely, what one would have to establish is that in our society the ready dissemination of information would seriously disrupt administrative procedures. This is the crucial point which I, as well as members in all three parties on this side of the House, would challenge; that is, the assumption that by making information available, such as scientific reports, letters, recommendations on trade policy and so on one could seriously disrupt the efficiency of the government. What evidence can be produced? There is the old, antiquated claim that controversy will reduce the frankness with which officials will argue their case. I do not agree with that. There is the serious counter argument that if people thought that what they intended to argue in written papers would be subject to scrutiny by opposition members, by university people and by editorial writers, they would certainly take more care in what they say and it is quite conceivable that the cogency of the arguments they present would be much better.