

itself centred on the Veterans Land Act; the notice of motion for the production of papers was merely a ploy to obtain a debate.

I am sure that both the mover and seconder of the motion knew that their request for the production of papers was not acceptable. They were asking for details of internal cabinet discussions and no doubt expected to be unsuccessful. We heard a certain amount of humbug. There was talk about democracy and some suggestion that it is the people's right to have these papers made public. Surely it is an important tenet of democracy that we shall protect officers of the Crown and their confidential advisers. I contended in that debate that the notes and memos of a minister running a department should be confidential as he may be discussing a program that might be retired, changed or initiated.

On January 23, 1975, I once more participated in a debate on the production of papers. I refer particularly to page 2551 of *Hansard* for that day. On that occasion the hon. member for Winnipeg North (Mr. Orlikow) asked for a long list showing the salaries of civil servants and also for the confidential report of the advisory committee. Such information fell under the category of "Consultant Studies" as set out in appendix B on page 2288 of *Hansard* for March 15, 1973. Naturally, when the consulting or advisory group was asked to make its report, it was determined that it was confidential. Also, naturally, it was implied that the resulting government decision would be made public.

Not only has this subject been discussed in the House; it has also been discussed on three occasions in the Joint Committee on Regulations and other Statutory Instruments. The main witness appearing before the committee on February 25, 1975, was Professor Rowat who was, as one would expect, in favour of loosening the guidelines, to give, in his captivating phraseology, more information to the citizens of Canada. He contended that far more information could be made public than the government is at present making public. He suggested that almost all conversations, letters, reports of meetings and government research in many fields should and could be opened widely to public gaze.

The principal witness appearing before the committee on March 4, 1975, was Dr. Dunton, formerly president of Carleton University. He contended, in the main, that a great deal of the knowledge gained by lower government circles when they explore new concepts and policies involving, for instance, pipelines, transportation, fiscal policies or possible projected changes should immediately be made available to lower echelons in parliament, to both government and opposition members. I point out that the hon. member for Kenora-Rainy River (Mr. Reid) appeared as a witness before the committee when it met on March 11 this year.

My reaction to all this is that premature release of information may be as bad as late release. Surely it is necessary and reasonable for the government, for the Prime Minister and the cabinet to hold discussions for some time before announcing an impending or possible new policy thrust. They must be given an opportunity to be in possession of most of the facts before other people possess them, because they are responsible for showing

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leadership in ensuing debates. I am of the opinion that this government, as its record will show, has been generous in producing background information.

Mr. Clark (Rocky Mountain): Even you can't keep a straight face.

Mr. Railton: If one reviews the record of the past few years to do with taxation, agriculture, inflation, rising food prices, natural resources, law of the sea, the international monetary fund, world oil prices, Syncrude, pipelines and immigration, one will see that this government has made available a great deal of information for the benefit of members of parliament and the public. The standing committee discussed procedures in other countries. Sweden, in particular, was represented as the ideal socialist state and was said to have advanced liberal laws allowing more public acquisition of confidential material. On close scrutiny it turns out that this is not quite correct. Members who have been there report that this ideal state of affairs is mythical. True, the laws are there, but in practice those members think more information can be dug out in Canada than in Sweden.

In conclusion, I say that we come out well in any comparison. The present government's policies and guidelines in divulging restrictive information are, in reality, better than those of most other countries. Of course, I expect opposition members to attempt to discover hidden facts, and as often as possible. That is their job. I also hope—I think members expect this—that the government will continually review its guidelines, accept criticism and attempt to liberalize, wherever possible, its treatment of restricted information.

● (1730)

Mr. Joe Clark (Rocky Mountain): Mr. Speaker, I want to begin by referring briefly to the remarks just made by the hon. member for Welland (Mr. Railton) and to say that I noted, though I was not particularly impressed by, the idea that the public is the patient in its relationship with the Government of Canada. I think the analogy the hon. member used was inapt in that particular, and I do not think it an apt analogy for another reason, that is to say, the reason for which this debate was generated being exactly opposite the case of someone, say, the Secretary of State, going to the Minister of Justice (Mr. Lang) and seeking a legal opinion.

What happened in this case was that the Minister of Justice sought to impose upon his colleague a legal opinion which was not requested. That surely changes any client relationship, even if the client relationship were a valid analogy for keeping from the people and the Parliament of Canada important exchanges of which this is only one symbol. The point was made by my distinguished hon. friend from Fundy-Royal earlier when opening this discussion, that what is at issue here is not the content of this particular letter but, instead, the practice which has unfortunately become deeply ingrained in the government of keeping information from parliament and from the people of Canada.

I am following in this debate, and I am honoured to do so, two hon. members, for Fundy-Royal (Mr. Fairweather), and for Peace River (Mr. Baldwin), who have won the