

*Search and Rescue*

this lake, whether they use it to earn their living or for recreation.

I have lectured in this House on two previous occasions, and I find it necessary to lecture again today as to the nature of parliamentary democracy in Canada. I said on those two occasions, and I say again today, that I agree with and recognize the absolute right of the Liberal party of Canada to govern this country and bring in legislation.

**Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre):** Not forever.

**Mr. Crosbie:** Just until the next election.

● (1710)

**An hon. Member:** We are ready.

**Mr. Whiteway:** Members opposite are so sure of the position of the Canadian people that perhaps they would like to put it to the test on a vote. Whenever they are ready, we on this side are.

I recognize the right of government to set fiscal and monetary policy, to set external affairs policy and to give national direction. That is their right. It has not been their practice, but nevertheless it is their right. They have the right to set taxes, a right they have exercised more than they should. They have the right to bring in a budget. In general, it is the right of the government to govern absolutely, and I recognize that. But if that is true, it is equally true that the opposition has the absolute right to scrutinize, to question, to investigate, to double-check, to suggest alternatives—yes, to criticize—and to be sure to oppose.

I cannot do my job as a member of the opposition without the kind of information I am asking for. I have already pointed out that the information I am seeking is not in any way going to jeopardize the security of the country or relations between the federal government and the province of Manitoba. I cannot in any way fulfil the responsibilities I have, not only to those who elected me to the House, but under the law of the land, unless I have this information. Surely that sort of information, which has been gained by taxpayers' money in the payment of public servants, ought to be as readily available to members of the opposition as to the government.

I am not asking for cabinet documents, or for letters or memos between cabinet ministers, or for information about what goes on in the Privy Council. I am not asking for secret agreements, if there are any, between one country and another. I am not asking for the deep secrets which lie in the mind of the Prime Minister. What I am asking for, Mr. Speaker, is to be told whether or not there have been studies, documents and meetings concerning the three levels I have already mentioned in relation to search and rescue on Lake Winnipeg.

This question is important if for no other reason than to alleviate the anxieties of those who use Lake Winnipeg for recreation or to gain their livelihood. I am not digging in the hope of uncovering some kind of government scandal, though heaven knows I suppose I could dig almost anywhere and come up with one. The former president of the privy council, the

[Mr. Whiteway.]

hon. member for Eglington (Mr. Sharp), on February 18, 1975, said this about members such as me who request information from the government:

(The government is trying) to encourage members of parliament to be more pointed and more precise in their requests for information.

That is a fair statement. He goes on to say:

If I may use a rather partisan word, the government is trying to discourage what are generally called fishing expeditions when the member does not quite know what it is he wants but hopes that if sufficient material is produced he will find something with which to criticize the government.

Now, Mr. Speaker, what fisherman ever caught a fish without first casting his line? Trying to get information from this government is like trying to scoop up water with a fish net. I am not trying to dredge up a scandal or to uncover some wrongdoing on the part of government. I am simply asking for information so I can answer questions which have been put to me by my constituents, questions which time and time again have been put by civil servants, some of the very people who have been given the duty of carrying out search and rescue operations on Lake Winnipeg. It is as simple as that.

This government is paranoid when it comes to giving out information. I suppose if I asked the government for a name, they would not give it to me for fear I was asking for some devious reason. The secretiveness of this government is clearly demonstrated in its refusal, for example, to give details of the Canadian CANDU reactor sales to Korea and Argentina. The government has refused to give details regarding the degree of radioactivity in the waters of Port Hope. It has refused to give details of the arsenic poison levels at Yellowknife. It has refused to give details of the tendering practice in dredging Hamilton Harbour. It has refused to give the details of CMHC tendering procedures for Sky Shops and the student co-operative housing at Rochdale. It has refused to give the Price, Waterhouse report regarding CIDA. It has even refused to give detailed information regarding the cost of the new Air Canada logo. I can see how that can bring down the government.

In short, Mr. Speaker, the government can be paranoid if it wants, but I hope there will be at least one member on the government side who can see the reasonableness of my request. I hope it is within the heart of at least one cabinet minister to produce this information which the people of Selkirk need, which they want and to which they have a right. It is ironic that the Prime Minister, that great knight in shining armour, would deny me, the hon. member for Selkirk, information that could jeopardize the safety and the lives of virtually hundreds of Canadians.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, any government that stifles opposition by secrecy destroys the very principle of parliamentary democracy which gave it its birth.

**Mr. William Rompkey (Grand Falls-White Bay-Labrador):** Mr. Speaker—

**Mr. Friesen:** You believe in air and sea rescue, don't you, Bill?