

*Information Canada*

to have been asked. So, I suggest it is nonsense for this ministry to talk about setting up elaborate information services until the Prime Minister and his ministers are prepared to discharge their fundamental responsibility of answering questions in this chamber.

**Some hon. Members:** Hear, hear.

**Mr. Stanfield:** I know there are differing views among members as to the wisdom of bringing the electronic media into this House, but it might very well have the advantage of compelling the ministers to give straightforward answers to questions that are placed before them.

The second aspect of information, of course, is that the services available to the citizen should be made known. What services are available, where they are available and how one obtains them should be known. It would seem obviously important that the citizens of the country have this information and that it be made available to them.

The task force recommended that the government assist the information services. I would have recommended that the government go further and assist existing community services that are strapped financially. It is extraordinary to me that this is one of the two recommendations made by the task force that the government has chosen not to implement. This recommendation directly relates to the knowledge the citizen has as to what services are available to him, yet it is not implemented. In spite of the impression given by the commentary of the Prime Minister, the establishment of this agency does not represent the implementation of the recommendations of the Glassco commission, which suggested a committee of co-ordination. It is a new superstructure being built within the government with regard to information services. The task force recognized at least some of the dangers inherent in the establishment of such an organization. It recognized that this could quite easily become a sort of ministry of propaganda. I say it is surely obvious that Information Canada could very easily become "manipulation Canada".

**Some hon. Members:** Hear, hear.

**Mr. Stanfield:** We must all be aware of that. The task force was sufficiently concerned with this problem that it recommended the establishment of rigid controls, but I do not find these controls when I read the report of the task force. It recommended the

establishment of a parliamentary committee, but it has not been demonstrated yet in this chamber that a parliamentary committee has sufficient independent authority to really constitute a safeguard.

● (2:20 p.m.)

The task force also recommended the appointment of a sort of public ombudsman relating to information. This is the second of the two recommendations the Prime Minister has chosen not to implement. So, speaking for myself and I think for members of the House generally in this respect, we want to see co-ordination of information services; we want to see the services administered efficiently. But we want to see this co-ordination without the establishment of another layer of bureaucracy with the distinct possibility of the manipulation of public opinion. It would be difficult to exaggerate this danger.

Information Canada is to gather information as well as disseminate or propagate it. I think it is significant psychologically that, while the task force spoke of this agency gathering information about the needs of the public, the Prime Minister in his statement spoke about it gathering information about the views of the public. I think this might have been a Freudian slip.

While the Prime Minister speaks about preserving the role of the Member of Parliament, it is difficult to envisage any way in which the role of the individual member of Parliament, as the person to be consulted about the views of the people is likely to be cut down more drastically than by this centralized information-gathering service which will feed information directly to the ministry.

**Some hon. Members:** Hear, hear.

**Mr. Stanfield:** This is carrying the regional desks of the government much further. My hon. friends opposite will become mere ciphers and members on this side of the House will not be the only "nobodies" after this.

There is the question of the cost. The Prime Minister speaks about this being a small unit. Well, I suppose that is all relative—

**An hon. Member:** What's a million?

**Mr. Stanfield:** —but let me emphasize that what the public really needs so far as information is concerned is not information that the government suggests be given it. What the public really needs basically is information which the government does not want to give it.