

# Canada Weekly

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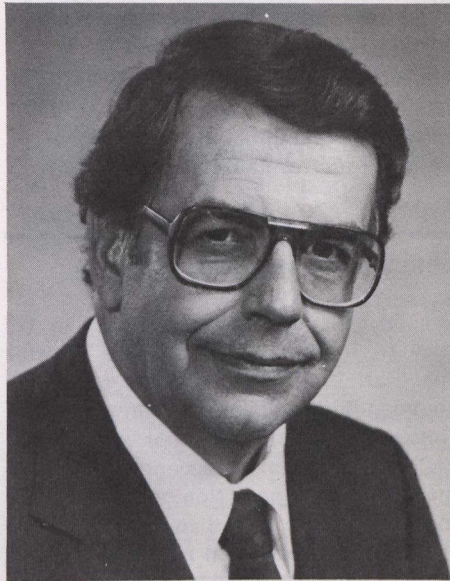
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## Freedom of information bill introduced in Commons

Canada will become the first country with a British parliamentary system to open up government records to the public if new freedom of information legislation, introduced in the House of Commons October 24, is implemented.

The legislation, introduced by Privy Council President Walter Baker, would provide access to information except for precisely defined exemptions and judicial review of Government decisions to withhold information.



Walter Baker

Under the present system, the Government is not obliged to release any information in its possession and it is usually withheld unless there is a positive decision to disclose it.

Four areas of information held by the Government would be exempt from disclosure under the new law.

### Obligations of government

The first area, obligations — where the government could not carry out its responsibilities as a result of publicity — includes:

- information obtained under international or federal-provincial agreements;

- information which could reasonably be expected to adversely affect federal-provincial negotiations;
- information reasonably expected to harm international relations, defence, and efforts aimed towards detecting, preventing or suppressing subversive or hostile activities as defined in the Act;
- defined classes of information harmful to law enforcement;
- information relating to the safety of individuals; and
- information which would have a substantial adverse affect on Canadian economic interests.

### Protection of privacy

The second area is personal information. Since freedom of information must be balanced against protection of an individual's privacy, this legislation would deny all access to personal information except where it relates to duties of government employees. An individual's right of access to his or her own file is now controlled under Part IV of the Canadian Human Rights Act. To increase that access and further protect access by third parties, the Government will soon propose amendments to that Act and remove it from the Human Rights Act.

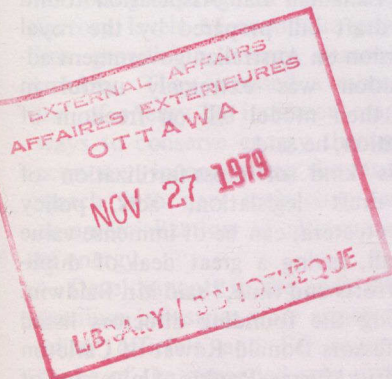
### Financial, commercial, scientific, technical

The third area is financial, commercial, scientific and technical information which could divulge trade secrets, harm the competitive position of companies or interfere with commercial contract negotiations. For the most part, this includes information provided to the Government by companies with the understanding it be kept confidential.

### Operations of government

The fourth area concerns the operations of government and is intended to protect information needed in making decisions. It includes:

- Cabinet records other than discussion papers;



Twenty-three years ago this week...

Prime Minister Louis St. Laurent announced the creation of the Canada Council for the encouragement of the arts, humanities and social sciences.

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