

What Information Canada needs really is an act of Parliament defining clearly its duties, its obligations and its limitations. As we set it up, it was all sail and no anchor, all chart and no compass. There was no clear definition of what it was supposed to do. And what has it been doing? It has been giving us a surfeit of information, the sort of thing which the distinguished Governor General spoke about when he spoke to the Canadian press in Toronto last week. He said, "We are being choked with paper, we have a surfeit of what is called information."

I am a reader, I even read the Bible, its poetry is among my favourites, but I cannot and could not ever find time to read all the matter that comes over my desk from Information Canada. Every two or three weeks I make an attempt to find my desk—by throwing out all the matter that comes from Information Canada. I do it with a sense of guilt for the poor dear charwoman who has to clean up my room the next morning.

This is nonsense. Information Canada was supposed to coordinate and to control the matter put out by the various departments. It has not been doing that. We are getting more matter, more so-called information from the various departments than ever before since I have been in this chamber. The trouble is that the people who are called information officers for those various departments are not information officers at all. Too often they are merely publicity agents for their ministers, supposing their jobs to be to show the Canadian public that this minister or that is a superman—and, my God, could there be a greater misinformation than that?

What is the proper need, if we are going to keep it? If there is an election—I do not think there is going to be one, but if there is one and the result is what I think it is going to be—

Hon. Mr. Martin: What do you think the result is going to be?

Hon. Mr. O'Leary: I said all that on Saturday. If the result is what I think it is going to be, I am afraid that Mr. Stanfield, being a responsible man, will have to get rid of Information Canada and start all over again.

Hon. Mr. Choquette: Hear, hear.

Hon. Mr. O'Leary: What Information Canada needs, or rather what such a department needs is, one, a responsible, knowledgeable, intelligent head; it wants what we in the press call a responsible managing editor; and, two, it wants a financial comptroller. We are spending too much money on this sort of thing. In the meantime, there should be set up in both chambers of Parliament a committee on information. If information is as vital as we say it is—and I think it is pretty vital in what is called participatory democracy—then surely each house should have a committee on information before which we could bring these young men and women to ask them why they are sending out this so-called information.

The other day my deskmate said, and quite truly, that you will read a speech in *Hansard*, you have it, and then three weeks later you get it all over again in a very expensive format. Surely it is nonsense for that to happen.

You know, honourable senators, I am a bit suspicious of this cry in the press now that the public has "a right to know." I very much doubt that proposition without limita-

[Hon. Mr. O'Leary.]

tions. In my early days when I went to a meeting of the press the great cry used to be "the freedom of the press." Now that has changed and it is "the public's right to know."

Who elected these people who are running the newspapers to see to it that the public has a right to know? Who gave them a mandate to see that the public has a right to know? This is nonsense. Do you think my friend Mr. Roy Thompson has a mandate from the Canadian people with respect to his 30 or 40 newspapers in Canada to see that the public has a right to know? I doubt that, and I am sure that if one of Mr. Roy Thompson's papers began to lose money he would soon forget all about the public's right to know. He would limit the mandate right there. He did it in Vancouver when he stopped a daily newspaper. If he had a mandate to see to it that the public had a right to know, did he also have a mandate to end that mandate?

This question came before the Supreme Court a few years ago, and I would advise honourable senators to read what the Supreme Court said about the mandate of any newspaper to see to it that the public has a right to know. No newspaper publisher has been given that mandate. All he can do is to see to it that his own newspaper gives information as objectively and as fairly as possible. Nothing more. But if you heard some of those people talking now you would think that the Cabinet should be holding its meetings on the mall. You just cannot carry on government that way. There are always things in government which must be kept confidential, not only for our own sake but for the sake of our allies, the people with whom we are negotiating.

I have always been suspicious of that cry. I have never been a great advocate of press freedom. The printed word is merely an extension of the spoken word, and the newspaper has no more freedom than I, as a humble individual, have. That is all. It is an extension of free speech, of the spoken word; and if you read the Fifth Amendment which is always being quoted in the United States, you will see that it speaks of the "freedom of speech and of the press." It is "freedom of speech and of the press," and freedom of speech came first. Freedom of the press was merely an extension of that. This is what we are forgetting in all this nonsense about information and the public's right to know.

I would set up Information Canada in a different way altogether. I would pass an act of Parliament saying exactly what its duties were, exactly what kind of information it was supposed to give the public and that is all. I would set up a strong financial control to see that they were not running away with public money. They are running away with public money now; I have no doubt in the world about that. I can take you to my room now and show you so-called information that I had four weeks ago, in other forms of print. This is silly. Features appearing in the press three weeks ago are all done up in the most magnificent way and sent to me by Information Canada. I cannot read that material. You cannot read it. I doubt if any member of this chamber ever reads one half, one quarter, of the so-called information sent to him by Information Canada.