

Access to Information

That is a very simple question requiring a very simple answer, but one which would be embarrassing, so the government is not answering.

The questions I have referred to may be embarrassing, but what about the exposé made by the hon. member for Leeds-Grenville (Mr. Cossitt) a short time ago in respect of directions which have been given in the Privy Council office concerning the withholding of information from members of Parliament in response to questions put on the order paper? If the attitude is to freeze out or prevent members of Parliament from obtaining information as a result of that type of very simple question, what hope is there indeed of any citizen obtaining information under the provisions of this bill?

Another simple question on the order paper which has been there since April 15 is:

What is the complete employment history with the CBC of Mr. Lionel Martin and is he presently stationed in Cuba (b) what were his qualifications that led to him being considered suitable for employment with the CBC?

That is a question requiring a very simple answer.

Again on the same page a question by the hon. member for Mississauga South (Mr. Blenkarn):

What was the cost of operating the Metric Commission during 1979?

Good Lord, sir, how simple must a question be before it is deserving of an answer? That question has been there since April 18. With that kind of record for refusing to provide information to members of Parliament what hope, sir, is there for any member of the public at large to achieve the release of any information under this bill, the provisions of which are fraught with all sorts of refuge for the government to seek if it does not want to provide embarrassing information?

Here is another question on page 102 which has been there since last April:

Does the government have any plans for the two Cadillacs formerly used by the Prime Minister up until May 22, 1979 and, if so, what are they?

That has reference to the present Prime Minister. That requires a simple answer which could be knocked off in a matter of seconds.

Someone else wanted a list of Canada Council grants, and that question has been on the order paper since last April.

Here is another question which I am sure, if application were made under the provisions of this bill, would receive the same short shrift, and it is to be found on page 97 and has been on the order paper since April. It is a very simple question:

How many persons named in the Taschereau papers on national security were not prosecuted and who were they and what was the reason?

If the answer to the question would endanger national security, that is all the answer that need be given, but there the question sits, and has since April. I ask why that is so, and I suggest it is because the attitude of this government in respect of providing information is not an attitude which will facilitate the provision of information, but will preclude the release of such information.

Finally, and I just want to mention one more before I give the minister time to sum up, this question appears on page 97 and was put on the order paper on April 14 of last year. It is:

Were there any individuals mentioned in the Taschereau file on National Security that were then or thereafter or at any time since, cabinet ministers and, if so, what are their names and in what connection were they mentioned?

If it is not in the interest of national security to provide that information, only that need be the simple answer to the question. One wonders why these questions are not answered.

I have very little hope that even with the passage of this bill in an improved form, with these rascals on the government benches now—

Mr. Knowles: Hon. rascals.

Mr. Nielsen: Hon. rascals, I am sorry; I do not want to be unparliamentary. I think there will be very precious little opportunity for any citizen to get information.

Mr. Collette: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. Following the very non-partisan debate we have had today I wonder if I might seek the indulgence of the House so the minister could have the normal few minutes to reply beyond ten o'clock. I realize our arrangement did not include this arrangement, but I wonder if we could sit a few minutes beyond ten o'clock in order that the minister could reply?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Blaker): The House has heard the proposal by the hon. parliamentary secretary to extend the minister a brief opportunity to respond.

Mr. Baker (Nepean-Carleton): Mr. Speaker, in a signal the minister passed across the floor he indicated that four minutes would be sufficient. I would be prepared to give him five. If the House would so order, I would give him the opportunity he wants.

Mr. Knowles: We will give him the same five.

Mr. Fox: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleagues on both sides of the House for the co-operation they have extended during the course of the debate today. I want to thank the hon. member for Yukon (Mr. Nielsen) in particular for his courtesy in allowing me a few minutes to respond following his highly objective and non-partisan speech, the type of thing he is very well known for in this House.

He spoke a great deal about the question of attitude. I was listening to some of the questions on the order paper read by the hon. member for Yukon.

● (2200)

Sometimes I get the impression that these are questions which they should have asked themselves during some of the time they were in government a few months ago. However, I suppose the hon. member did not have the time either to ask himself those questions or to answer them during that brief period of time.