

many exceptions particularly with reference to national defence, foreign policy or internal administration of certain departments.

In the United States, the Freedom of Information Act was enacted in 1967. Although a great deal of freedom of information has been granted to American citizens under this Act, it can be said that many classes of documents are exempt from the Act.

In Canada the situation is reportedly less clear, for there would be no statutory provision on the publication of that kind of documents, except the Official Secrets Act.

There remains for us to rely on custom which has proven its worth in many areas including possibly this one. Governmental departments must examine each request before reaching a decision. It can be assumed that publication of documents is conducive to good administration. We have only to remember some of the good results derived from the publication of certain documents. Indeed the parties' interest is thus made public through publication of certain documents and this may sometimes be useful. It invites reactions from public opinion so that a good administration may ensue. It provides information each time the activities of the administration are discussed or criticized and in such cases where it can be regarded as a means of control.

Documents should normally be publicized but officers are not legally bound to provide information other than the official account, neither on their own authority nor on request. It could occur however that authorities will refuse to reveal what could be detrimental to public interest. This is where we could say that some documents must really be and remain confidential, not only for those who prepared them, who have not finished them, but also to protect the public at large.

In my humble opinion, the fact remains that we should rightly be concerned with suggestions for liberalizing access to official papers. I believe that knowing that any memorandum could be made public could exert a negative influence which might slow down or put a stop to a movement an enthusiasm or an interest. This would have an adverse effect on the conduct of certain public affairs.

I believe that for the development of a policy the mind should be given free play. There must be dedication to the task, and special favourable conditions. All alternative means of achieving the purpose must be explored at length and there must be wide-ranging studies, as in the case mentioned by the mover on matters of comparison between the Department of Public Works and a Crown corporation. It would, in my opinion, be stupid or undesirable to subject some of the solutions envisaged to general scrutiny.

Emphasis on every activity of administration being made public would, in my opinion, hinder the smooth running of discussions and deliberations which are necessary for judicious administration.

If officials of the Department of Public Works, or others, have now been conducting in-depth studies over months, perhaps even years, with the prospect of transforming the Department of Public Works into a Crown

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Corporation, it is normal that these studies be published only after they are finished. Some points are being examined, the opinions of experts, engineers, public servants are being discussed and it would not be advisable at all to make these studies, these plans available to the public, even to hon. members. Hon. members are entitled to information, but only when everything is finished and has become official. In Canada bureaucracy is not so gigantic, whatever might be said sometimes.

• (5:30 p.m.)

The number of competent researchers is rather limited.

I think it might be possible to set up a better system to publish specific documents or files, in order to satisfy legitimate requests from researchers.

If there is any gap in the official policy with regard to information in the field of administration, and if these gaps constitute a serious handicap either to historical research or other types of research, or to the activity of members of Parliament, instead of introducing the same motions in each session and wasting efforts, it might be more logical, more sensible and more efficient to propose the drafting of regulations or legislation that would clearly state what category of document could, in the future, be considered confidential or not.

This is why, considering the case in point, and assuming that studies have been launched in order to draw a comparison between the future of the Department of Public Works and the efficiency or the use of a Crown corporation, I can only approve the attitude of the Minister of Public Works who decided, pursuant to the established practice, to consider these documents as being confidential, as he is responsible for them in the final analysis, and as it is his duty to refuse to produce the documents requested by the hon. member for Broadview.

[English]

Mr. B. Keith Penner (Thunder Bay): Mr. Speaker, from reading over the notice of motion we are now debating, and before I heard the hon. member speak, I drew the inference that the mover of the motion is among those who favour the proliferation of Crown corporations and he is curious to know whether we can soon expect to see a new one rising over the horizon. Having heard the hon. member, it would appear that is his point of view. I cannot entirely agree with him.

Mr. Gilbert: It has been expressed by the deputy minister. All I did was express his opinion.

Mr. Penner: It may have been expressed by the deputy minister, and probably has been studied. It is my understanding, however—and I do not know how reliable my grapevine is—that now the idea has been discarded. If that in fact is the case, I would applaud it. This leaves me to consider briefly the whole question of government and its many agencies in relation to society as a whole. If I may be permitted to do so in the few minutes left, Mr. Speaker, I should like to pursue that theme.

Recently I had occasion to read once again the interesting and thought-provoking book by Peter F. Drucker entitled "The Age of Discontinuity," which was written