

Information Canada

Information Canada will have about 25 information officers whose role will be to deal with information which is outside the normal concern of any single department and to assist the departments, on request, when supplementary resources are needed for particular occasions. The rest of the staff will be engaged in such tasks as answering public enquiries, co-ordinating existing departmental information work, advising on the application of modern technology to government information organizations, providing reports on public concerns, and developing efficient reference services both for pictures and the printed word.

● (2:10 p.m.)

[English]

The organization will be divided into four branches—one for planning and research; one to produce and distribute information; one to gather and publish information on the views of the public; and an administrative branch. The Exhibition Commission, the still photo library of the National Film Board, and the publishing and selling functions of the Queen's Printer will be transferred to Information Canada to be components of the production and distribution branch.

The net cost of the new organization, excluding amounts being subtracted from existing departmental information budgets, will be in the order of \$1 million in 1970-71. When we add the current budgets of units being incorporated, the total budget will be about \$7¼ million. Information Canada will be expected to achieve economies to offset part of its own costs after it has been established and operating for some time.

In summary, Information Canada is to be a small federal information unit along the lines of the task force's proposals. Every modern government maintains an information organization, many of them more centralized or larger than the one we contemplate for Canada. But their role is generally only to produce and distribute information. Information Canada will be equally concerned with what citizens wish to say to their government. Whatever they say through opinion surveys will be public information, subject, of course, to the protection of personal privacy, all reports on public viewpoints will be made public. I believe this material will be of substantial value to all members of this House in effectively representing the Canadian people.

[Mr. Trudeau.]

We welcome the recommendation that information policy be referred to a committee of Parliament. I would go further than the task force and suggest that a parliamentary committee review not only the objectives, policies and operations of Information Canada but also the information objectives of all departments. This parliamentary scrutiny would, I think, be a healthy process, especially if the committee were to consider its role as not only a surveillance but also as the more positive task of proposing means to bring government even closer to the people.

That is the government's objective in making this announcement, and it will remain our objective as we pursue the difficult but essential task of expanding the dimensions of democratic dialogue in this nation.

Hon. Robert L. Stanfield (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, the announcement made by the Prime Minister is one of great importance. The cover design of the report of the task force which recommended the establishment of Information Canada bears an exclamation mark and a question mark. Perhaps the exclamation mark was intended to emphasize the far-reaching nature of the overhaul recommended and the question mark was intended to indicate the doubts about the recommendation that was being made.

There are several aspects of government information, of course. One of these relates to policy. The position taken by the white paper in Great Britain published in June, 1969, among others, was that the main responsibility for explaining policy to Parliament and to the public must continue to rest with the ministers.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Stanfield: This task force was not given any directions. In fact, I think it was told to keep away from the role of Parliament. Yet the task force nevertheless said, among other things, that the ministers must provide more informative answers in Parliament than has been the tradition.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Stanfield: If I may say so, Sir, we see extraordinary evasion from day to day on the part of ministers opposite. In fact, it is almost the general rule rather than the exception for ministers to answer, not questions as posed to them, but other questions they would prefer