legislation. I merely wanted to make sure that nothing flowed out of the remarks made by the Solicitor General.

It is not the intention of my party to vote against this bill at the end of this day. In fact, it is our intention to send the bill to committee quickly because there are some obvious deficiencies which have been pointed out to the Secretary of State (Mr. Fox) by the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Clark), by the hon. member for Burnaby (Mr. Robinson), and which will be pointed out by other speakers in the course of this debate.

This fundamental piece of legislation strikes right at the heart of ministerial responsibility. When the Secretary of State introduced Bill C-43 into the House and held his press conference, I had occasion to comment on the bill, and on first blush I joined with other observers in saying that I was absolutely delighted with the bill. I thank the minister for his kindnesses to me, but I must say that on close reading of that bill those thoughts have become a bit sour. If I were asked to make a comment today, I would have to say that the bill is a giant leap forward for a Liberal government, but not quite the leap that I thought it was when I first looked at the bill, and indeed which other observers thought it was on first examination.

In fact, when I first examined the bill I came to a surprising conclusion because I had thought that the struggles in which I first participated during the period of time when, as the then government House leader, I had the pleasure of piloting the first freedom of information bill through the House at second reading had won acceptance within the bureaucracy and that this work was not in vain. As I say, when I saw that a majority of the clauses were left untouched, I was happy to congratulate the minister. But I was surprised, quite frankly, when I first ventured into this legislation. I do not believe that I am speaking out of school if I say to the minister—because he has probably run into similar situations—that I was surprised at the number of roadblocks put up by right thinking public servants who were used to dealing with things in a particular way to the concept of so dramatically changing the idea of openness which we were discussing. These were the same public servants who had contributed to the Roberts green paper. What I found was that there was a willingness to release more information, but not a willingness to lose control over what might be released.

Among the plaudits which should be extended today, I have to say that as the then president of the privy council responsible for introducing freedom of information legislation, I do not believe our bill would have gone through the various stages known to the minister in cabinet and within the public service, and ultimately to the floor of this House of Commons, if our government had not had the commitment of the then prime minister, now the Leader of the Opposition, to the concept of freedom of information.

At the time we recognized that even our bill, which in modesty I believe, as the discussions go on, will prove to be the bill toward which the Secretary of State should move in terms of some of the exemptions and other clauses, broke new ground. At the outset, what we were talking about then was not intended to be the last word in the freedom of information legislation, but actually the first word. It was a new concept in terms of government operations. It is something to which the public service, ministers, parliamentarians and others would have to become accustomed. Parliament should be given a free rein in terms of its work in the committee to discuss the terms of the bill. The government ought not to tramp hard in its desire to maintain the words or the breadth of the exemptions if a good case can be made for changing them, subject to the best interests of the country. That was the attitude with which the matter was pursued by our government.

I regret to say this to the minister—and I say it in a most positive way—but upon reviewing Bill C-43, it is clear to me that really nothing has been gained. It is true that the bill has some technical improvements, and they were listed by the Leader of the Opposition. In so far as improving on the breadth of the exemptions, for example, the trail that we hacked out has been paved with the same old tar by the same old road gang. The cabinet has added a high profile improvement every few pages, all the while rather gutting the important clauses in the bill.

● (1640)

There is nothing that is really of value that can be released that would not happily have been surrendered under the old regime. Those clauses exempting information from release have been expanded to such a degree that the bill, I must say in kindness at least at this point—and I hope it will not be so when it comes back to the House for third reading—has to be described as an organized giant leap backwards. I should say that openly to the minister because I think he has become subject to the tradition of his party and perhaps the traditions within the Canadian government other than those at the political level. While those improvements that I am prepared to acknowledge are noteworthy, I think we will have to examine some of the others that have been detailed by other speakers.

I want to say something about a couple of other matters now. I think all of us are blinded by the government's seeming conversion, on the face of it, to the concept of judicial review. The idea of putting this in a freedom of information bill is certainly new. I recall that in 1979 when I brough forward Bill C-15, the hon. member for Kenora-Rainy River (Mr. Reid), who had been the minister for federal-provincial relations in the previous government, spoke as opposition critic. He took great issue with the idea of judicial review, saying that ministers must ultimately be responsible. I think he was putting forth very forcefully what has been the traditional line of a party that has been most conservative on the subject of freedom of information. I hope hon. members opposite will not consider themselves blasphemed if I use that term; I use it with a small "c" to protect their honour and my own.

In Bill C-43 the minister has brought forth a form of judicial review. I do not quarrel now with the details of judicial review as we will deal with that in committee, but it is balanced, indeed counterbalanced, by a broadening of the exemptions to such an extent that I believe, when putting