

Science Council

quences of publicity. There is also the possibility they might be inclined to find ways of keeping delicate matters out of written reports. They would speak rather than write. Disclosure of documents, position papers and reports emasculated by caution would help the public little.

Albert S. Able, Professor of Law, University of Toronto, writing on administrative secrecy notes that the chief danger to the administrative process of a policy of "general disclosure" is a "potential freezing of channels of communication." He states:

● (5:10 p.m.)

Effective administrative supervision calls for informed decision making which calls for free communication between staff members and between levels. Opponents of administrative secrecy tend to pooh-pooh claims that there would be much less of either if everything were an open book. But common experience belies them as to volunteered complaints and reports. It is human nature to be candid in confidence and coy for the record. No doubt private tipoffs must be sifted sceptically—and no doubt most public servants know that by and large they are unreliable. But to discourage their coming in for sifting would measurably asphyxiate many an administrative program. As for communication with a department or agency, what would be lost is not so much information as a shirtsleeves exchange of ideas. When one is seeking answers, there is need to range tentatively and discursively without worrying constantly whether one would look silly on paper. It is batting things back and forth, not a series of formal position papers, from which constructive solutions arise. Private deliberations and public postures are entirely different styles of discourse and communications which have to be made with an eye to the latter only imperfectly provide the advice and suggestions needed for wise and flexible administration.

Modern government is a complex business, the biggest in the country, and cabinet is burdened by heavy tasks. The process of decision-making is influenced by party programs, the views of special interest groups, the work of interdepartmental committees and the careful sifting of cabinet committees. The work load might become intolerable if all stages of the process were fully open to public view.

Those favouring an open administration note that for 200 years there has been full access to most government documents in Sweden. However, the report of the task force on government information has this to say:

The Swedish system of open administration may be admirable but it is not necessarily easily adaptable to Canadian conditions. Nor is there much evidence that the real results for the public—in improved quality of information or lack of suppression of essential documents—are notably different from the results in the Canadian or United States

[Mr. Forest.]

systems...however, the atmospheres in which the public seeks and the government releases information, are markedly different.

Both Sweden and Canada have a parliamentary system and a cabinet responsible to the legislature, but the Swedish cabinet differs significantly from the Canadian. Sweden has attempted to separate the administrative and political functions of government through the use of Royal Administrative Boards...the satisfactory transplanting of Swedish practices in access to public documents might be difficult to achieve.

At its root the problem of revealing or concealing background information is one of balance and compromise. The Fulton committee which examined the civil service in Britain had this to say:

We recognize that there must always be an element of secrecy (not simply on grounds of national security) in administration and policy-making. At the formative stages of policy-making, civil servants no less than ministers should be able to discuss and disagree among themselves about possible courses of action, without danger of their individual views becoming a matter of public knowledge; it is difficult to see how on any other basis there can be mutual trust between colleagues and proper critical discussion of different hypotheses. But the material, and some of the analyses, on which these policy discussions are going forward, fall into a different category; unless there are overriding considerations to the contrary (e.g. on grounds of national security, the confidential nature of information supplied by individual firms, or to prevent improper financial gain), there would be positive advantages all round if such information were made available to the public at the formative stage of policy-making.

The committee went on to suggest that a government inquiry "make recommendations for getting rid of unnecessary secrecy". This may appear to be a worthy proposal but it is a long way from recommending that all background reports and documents used by the administration be published.

This has been a long reply to the request of the hon. member, but it may bring enlightenment to other such requests and act as a guideline to such motions for production of papers. In this particular instance, I believe it would not be in the public interest to divulge this document.

Mr. G. W. Baldwin (Peace River): Mr. Speaker, I am very fortunate to have been in the chamber to hear the parliamentary secretary, for whom I have great personal regard, give this most enlightening reply. I must say that never have I heard so much garbage. Perhaps the hon. member was prompted to rise to his feet by the pollution bill with which we have just been dealing.