

Freedom of Information

Mr. Waddell: But power tends to change one a little bit, and we are still faced with examples of ministers getting up and making policy decisions without us really knowing what is behind them. I should like to take an example from the past. For example, the Pickering airport is a case where there are environmental factors against economic factors, present land use against future land use. We have: "where would the development go?" against "when would it go there?" When all is said and done, it would have been better to have had all the information out on the table, out in the open in the beginning. One does not have to read Mr. Stewart's book to know that. The object would be to have a rational and sensible policy. That is an example of where freedom of information would have been useful.

I suppose we can ask ourselves the following questions. What are the objectives we are seeking to serve by enacting this freedom of information? Is it ultimately to reduce the size of government, to decrease regulation? Is it to speed up or slow down government? Do we think government is too big or too unaccountable and not the good thing we thought it might be? I suppose that depends on where you stand in the political spectrum. But we in the New Democratic Party believe in positive government. We believe in government. We are not afraid of government. We want it to be lean, accountable, workable and, above all, we want it be open. That is why we are in favour of this legislation.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Waddell: In a statement issued on April 25, 1979, the Leader of the New Democratic Party (Mr. Broadbent) said that the NDP has consistently pursued the need for freedom of information legislation because of the party's strongly held belief that a well-informed citizenry is the lifeblood of a democracy.

The Trudeau government brought down a green paper on June 29, 1977, entitled: "Legislation on Public Access to Government Documents". We criticized it because it was a weak paper. I do not see my friend, the hon. member for Kenora-Rainy River in the House.

An hon. Member: He has gone to join the Tories.

Mr. Waddell: He has gone to where all Liberals ultimately gather.

Mr. Kempling: To his old seat.

Mr. Waddell: It must have been very difficult for the member, and I congratulate him. Incidentally, the member is a former teacher of mine. I am pleased to have an opportunity to speak after him. Probably he thinks I have gone astray, no doubt. It must have been very hard for him because the record of the Liberal party on freedom of information is really bad, a really sorry record. They had lots of time to enact a bill. It is an appalling record. Nothing was done. For example, the then government announced in the Speech from the Throne on October 11, 1978, that it proposed a freedom of information bill. What happened? They backed away from such a bill. But

finally we have a bill. If the Liberal record on freedom of information is an example of the radical middle or an example of the dead centre, then I suspect the electorate of Canada will further turn away from that party. Finally we have a bill to deal with, so let me deal with it.

Mr. Harquail: Please do.

Mr. Waddell: It seems to me that a lot of work has to be done on the bill. I should like to make some comments specifically on some portions of the bill. I say this to the President of the Privy Council and Minister of National Revenue—

Mr. Harquail: Oh, oh!

Mr. Waddell: If the hon. member wishes to speak, he can speak after me.

An hon. Member: He can't; he is a Liberal.

Mr. Harquail: I congratulate you on your maiden speech.

Mr. Waddell: Thank you. He is a Liberal. I say to the President of the Privy Council that he has broadened the exemptions but he has not narrowed them. They have broadened the exemptions and they are not narrowed by these excessive words. It is a much broader bill and it contains many more words than the draft bill of the Canadian Bar Association which, in my view, was much better. The Bar Association approached it on the basis of detailed exemptions, which is good, but the government has said too much. It has gone too far. The words gave the effect of extending the exemptions. We will go into this in some greater detail in committee, but I should like to direct the attention of the President of the Privy Council to clause 15 of the bill, the definitions of international relations and defence. Clause 15(2)(a) refers to the defence of Canada and reads as follows:

'the defence of Canada or any state allied or associated with Canada' includes the efforts of Canada toward detecting, preventing or suppressing activities of any person, group of persons or foreign state directed toward actual or potential attack or other hostile acts against Canada or any state allied or associated with Canada—

What does that mean? What does "any state allied or associated with Canada" mean? We are allied or associated with a lot of states. The definition goes on to talk about "subversive or hostile activities". I draw the minister's attention to clause 15(2)(b)(iv) which reads as follows:

—activities directed toward gathering intelligence relating to Canada or any state allied or associated with Canada—

What is meant by "subversive or hostile activities"? It seems to me that under this bill we could never have received any of the information, for example, about the FLQ crisis in 1970. Clearly the people, the powers that be in External Affairs, Defence, the RCMP and so on, have really got to the government on this matter. They have put in such broadly worded exemptions that basically the bill is worth very little in these areas. This is something the committee will have to look into. I hope the hon. member for Peace River, noting his integrity, will raise these matters in his speeches in committee.