

try. Not all banks were willing to do so, however. As a matter of fact, the banks were dragged kicking and screaming to the table. I remember the then president of the Canadian Bankers' Association, a delightful gentleman of Scottish ancestry—I will not name the bank of which he was then general manager—felt that it was quite wrong for the banks to get involved in mortgages of up to 25 years. The banks never lent on anything more than two years. Loans were always liquid. There was no such thing as a loan on a chattel mortgage. The banks were expressly prohibited from dealing on the basis of a chattel mortgage. Nevertheless, the general feeling was that banks should get involved in the mortgage business. We were working from the Porter commission report, remember, and this was one of its recommendations. However, there was a definite limit. One did not forget the bank crisis of either 1932 or 1934 in the United States.

Mr. Knowles: Ten o'clock!

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Blaker): Order, please. I am sorry to interrupt the hon. member but we have now reached ten o'clock.

● (2200)

PROCEEDINGS ON ADJOURNMENT MOTION

[*English*]

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 40 deemed to have been moved.

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION—DIRECTIVES TO MINISTERS

Hon. Perrin Beatty (Wellington-Dufferin-Simcoe): Mr. Speaker, on May 14 of this year I asked the Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. MacEachen) if, pending the introduction of the freedom of information bill, the government had issued any directions to cabinet ministers to the effect that they should conduct themselves in strict adherence and compliance with the principles of freedom of information. Although the Deputy Prime Minister answered me in the affirmative, events since that time have led me to doubt the government's sincerity in terms of complying with principles of freedom of information.

Despite the high marks that were given to the bill on its early introduction, subsequent reflection on taking a look at that bill and comparing it with its predecessor from the previous government, C-15, leads one to wonder whether serious changes have not been made which make the bill much more restrictive than its predecessor.

It would take too long this evening for me to enumerate all those problems. Suffice it to say there are a number of changes which will make it more difficult for Canadians to have access to information. First, Bill C-43 will make it harder to discover what documents actually exist. For instance, section 5(3)

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implies that if information appears to be exempt from release, it does not have to be listed in information bulletins. Second, the exemption categories appear to go further than the previous bill in protecting information from release. Third, the status, powers and pay of the information commissioner have been eroded considerably. Fourth, and perhaps most important, it does not appear as though the additional powers given to the courts will promote the degree of openness that ought to be expected.

For example, if a judge is deciding whether a document in certain categories ought to be withheld, he cannot decide whether the department head is entitled to withhold it, but only whether he had reasonable grounds for doing so. Finally, and if these changes were not bad enough, the provision in the previous government's bill requiring the freedom of information committee to produce a comprehensive review of the effectiveness of the act after three years has been dropped in this new provision.

My concern about the government's policy on freedom of information is not limited strictly to the changes which have been made in the bill which is currently before the House. My most pressing concern relates to the government's activities in recent days and the attitude exhibited over the course of the last several days over the whole question of freedom of information.

Perhaps the best example I can give of how the government has demonstrated that it does not subscribe to the principles of freedom of information was given yesterday in the committee on the constitution. Members of that committee asked the government whether it would make available to the committee, as an aid to study of the government's proposals on the constitution, three polls conducted by the government at public expense which touched on the whole question of constitutional reform.

What I thought incredible was that government members on the committee and the Minister of Justice (Mr. Chrétien) refused to agree with the principle that publicly funded polls should not be classified, that they should be made available to the people of Canada. This is a principle which is essential and one which should be respected by the government if it is serious about the principle of freedom of information. This is why we pressed them in committee to agree that those polls be released. The government has refused.

What we have seen in recent days has been a desire on the part of government to use massive amounts of tax dollars to sell its position on various issues, including on the constitutional issue, where the government—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Blaker): Order, please. I have listened to the hon. member. He very appropriately used the phrase "as an example". From there on he has been commenting on certain matters before the constitutional committee and some of the proceedings relating to that committee. The problem is that at a certain time he fell afoul of the rule that committee proceedings are not to be commented upon in the