

We have already expressed our opposition to a central information agency on the grounds that it is not an efficient means of getting information to the people. This, we feel, is not the proper role for Information Canada, although many of its critics claim that it is acting as a central information agency, with more independence than it actually possesses. The Committee considers that as a regulating and co-ordinating agency, Information Canada should de-emphasize its role as an initiator of information programs. An example of such programs was the heavily criticized Automated Information Monitoring Services (AIMS). Although the project never got off the ground, it was proposed that Information Canada create the electronic equivalent of a newspaper clipping service, supplying clients—for a fee—with news items concerning the federal government culled from 76 daily newspapers, eleven AM radio stations and 44 television stations, including the national networks. Quite apart from the fact that such a service would compete with similar businesses in the private sector, Information Canada was on dubious ethical grounds. As editorialists rightly pointed out, workers in communications media would not look favourably on the pirating of their creations by a government agency.

This kind of ambitious scheme really fills no felt need. The only result was to subject Information Canada to further criticism, in this case well merited. This does not mean to say that Information Canada should travel only in well-defined grooves. There are many and varied information needs not covered by existing programs, and they should be continually sought out and pinpointed. For example, changes in government policy with regard to native peoples in the North may have some effect on those in the southern part of Canada too, and Information Canada should be aware of such instances and should ensure that those affected by, or interested in such policy changes, may be fully informed of them by the department concerned. As examples of information of general application successfully furnished by Information Canada, we may cite the publicizing of the Local Initiatives Program which involved the successful co-ordination of the information efforts of approximately ten departments, and the publication of Citizens' Guides which give a capsuled account of subjects of current concern.

Such an approach to supplying information may be less spectacular than an AIMS program, but it is certainly less abrasive and more in line with the ideals of a regulating agency. Similarly there are many "grey areas" of government policy which are not the exclusive responsibility of any one department. External Affairs, Industry, Trade and Commerce, and National Defence may all be involved in some overseas trade negotiations, and Information Canada should work with their information services to produce the necessary information packages without the omissions and duplications which would result if each went its own way.

Very often, there arises a public need for certain kinds of information, to which a department may be slow to respond, or to which a number of