

the exceptions listed in clause 2 provide adequate safeguards to the state.

In support of the bill the *Globe and Mail* editorialized as follows at its first introduction:

One bad side effect of the prodigious growth of government in this century is that it has become exceedingly difficult to keep track of. Not only are governments themselves much more deeply and widely involved in the life of the people, but their tasks have become so numerous that they have had to delegate much of their authority to boards and commissions. Accompanying this governmental growth has been a disinclination on the part of governments and their creatures to keep the public informed about what they are doing.

A private bill has been presented to the House of Commons which could do much to open these many closed doors and keep the public informed about what is, after all, its own business The bill would require that "every administrative or ministerial commission, power and authority shall make its records and information available to any person at his request in reasonable manner and time."

The editorial then listed the exceptions contained in clause 2, and concluded:

The government should put its blessing on the bill and ensure its passage.

I said earlier that the government had taken one or two tentative steps in the general direction proposed by this bill. One of those steps was taken in 1969 when the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) announced a policy which, he said, was to make available for research and other public use as large a portion of Canadian government records prior to July 1, 1939, as would be consistent with national interest.

He said that the cabinet secretariat and the departments and agencies of government were being asked to transfer to the Public Archives official records which were more than 30 years old, and to make them available to the public. In other words, classified documents were to be declassified after 30 years and their contents made available to journalists, students and other interested persons. In April, 1972, the Prime Minister announced that the minutes of the war cabinet from the start of 1942 until the end of the Second World War had been turned over to the Dominion Archivist for public examination.

I understand that in regard to the departments and agencies of government being encouraged to make their documents and records available to the Archives, a special committee drafted regulations to govern that procedure, but the documents in large measure are still not on the shelves in the Public Archives. I urge that the government take steps to speed up the passage of these documents to public view. That is one aspect of the situation which this bill seeks to rectify.

Another aspect, of more practical and political interest, relates to the difficulty experienced by Members of Parliament, the representatives of the public, in securing access to information on government data on the basis of which government departments and agencies have made their decisions, which decisions in turn affect the lives of the people of the country. On the order paper there are 34 notices of motions for the production of papers. As hon. members know, they may remain on the order paper for a long period of time, and in fact may die on it. Very few of them will be effectively answered, and very few of the records will be turned over for examination. It is quite

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common for the hon. member answering on behalf of the government to say that for this reason or that reason—in fact it seems to many of us for no particular reason—it is impossible to provide the information sought by a representative of the public. I believe that this is wrong, Mr. Speaker.

The situation in Canada is quite opposite to that which has prevailed in Sweden where everything which is not specified as being secret is available to the public for its information and examination. Here the reverse is the case. Here everything is secret unless it is specified as being otherwise.

I believe that real good could be achieved if the papers and data upon which the government makes its decisions were made available to the members of this chamber who are the representatives of the people affected by the government's decisions. I find it a particularly strange situation at present when the public is paying scores of millions of dollars annually for Information Canada and departmental information agencies to produce and distribute the sort of information which the government wants the public to get. This is at a time when information that the public wants to receive from its elected representatives is not available. There are obstacles in the way. I think a much healthier situation would be for the government to take steps to make this information available to the public, within reason.

• (1710)

I know that hon. members are likely to find faults in the details of the clauses in which my proposals are couched. I can understand that, Mr. Speaker, and I make no claim that the bill is perfect. However, I would urge hon. members, when considering the clauses, to view this as a matter of considerable importance to all Canadians. It deserves study and referral to an appropriate committee. I think the Standing Committee on Justice and Legal Affairs would be the most appropriate one.

The last time this bill was before the House, April, 1970, the hon. member who is now the Secretary of State (Mr. Faulkner), said that it did not go far enough. It may well be, Mr. Speaker, that the bill still does not go far enough but I would urge the House to at least let it go somewhere, and I think that should be to a committee.

[Translation]

Mr. Jacques Olivier (Longueuil): Mr. Speaker, concerning the legislation proposed by my hon. colleague, I do not feel that one may object to the public having access to any information that should be released to them.

However, making available to the public all documents of the various departments might perhaps not be in line with security rules. I think we must also ensure that this bill is not misleading or does not prevent any initiative on the part of officials.

I should like to give a few examples. If, for some reason, we ask a public servant to make an analysis of a given project, which would lead him to give details concerning his work or express his view, I think that the immediate release of this information, without the thoughtful consent of the government, might be detrimental to the public and give them the wrong impression that this government