

Mr. Dionne (Northumberland-Miramichi): In my comments I was not referring to any particular party. We have only to witness what happens in the provinces, as well as in the federal capital, to see that the penchant for secrecy is not confined to any one party. Many problems could be averted if there were consultation and a free flow of information. For example, the waste of public funds in industrial adventures which are poorly conceived and executed—might be avoided if the public knew what the government was investing from the beginning, and what future plans the government had for the investment of public funds in those ventures.

Over the past quarter of a century, the developed world has experienced an absolutely phenomenal increase in the information which has become available through scientific study and the complex problems that has created. Representatives such as myself have not been able to keep pace with the complexity of these issues because we have not been given the tools to do so. Again, if anyone is to blame it is ourselves, and perhaps the public at large, for not demanding of government that their representatives be given sufficient staff and research assistants in order to keep fully informed of the complex issues we face.

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Government, on the other hand, has been able to more or less keep pace by hiring in the public service in its jurisdiction the experts it needs to deal with these complexities. Because of the complexities of the problems we face and because society itself has become much more complex in the last 25 years, bureaucracy has grown at a rather phenomenal rate and there has been a passive usurpation of power that should belong to the elected representatives of the people into the hands of the bureaucracy, which very often seems to be accountable to no one. That seems to me to be the crux of the problem. We should be talking about accountability rather than freedom of information.

I have no objection to the term "freedom of information", but when we have absolute accountability we will automatically have freedom of information, it seems to me. We have in this country many public servants who are extremely dedicated and knowledgeable and who are in many cases making personal financial sacrifice, personal family sacrifice and personal leisure sacrifice to serve their country, so I do not want my remarks to be misconstrued as an attack on the bureaucracy. But over the years the power base has shifted, in my opinion, from the elected representatives of the people to the continuing invisible government that is known as the bureaucracy. Until that power base is shifted back into the hands of the people who are put here by the public at large to represent them, we will continue to have a problem in respect of freedom of information.

What must happen, in my view, is that members of elected legislatures have to be given the tools, and they must receive adequate compensation. I am not complaining about the compensation level of federal members of parliament, but at the provincial level, particularly of some of the provinces of this great and wealthy nation of ours, the recompense offered is a disgrace.

Freedom of Information

Mr. Johnston: Let's hear it for the federal members while you are at it. Don't chicken out.

Mr. Dionne (Northumberland-Miramichi): I understand the hon. member would not be interested because he is quitting. In any event, I am not complaining about my level of recompense, but I do complain about the fact that, although we are considered responsible enough to represent constituencies containing anywhere from 45,000 or 50,000 people to 120,000 or 130,000 people, we are not yet considered by this institution itself to be sufficiently responsible to control a budget for the employment of personnel in our own offices. If the institution in which we serve has no confidence in us, I wonder how the people are to have any confidence in us.

I have tried in my few brief remarks to point out that the problem, in my view, is one not of freedom of information but of accountability. I am referring to the accountability of the invisible government which cannot be changed by any election, no matter what party is elected to office. Until that situation is changed, and until the elected representatives of the people have control over that invisible government, we will continue to have a problem in respect of access to information.

Mr. G. W. Baldwin (Peace River): Mr. Speaker, may I respond first for just a minute or so to the speech of the hon. member for Northumberland-Miramichi (Mr. Dionne). I agree with him that there is a problem regarding accountability; this is a problem of all democratic governments today. But that accountability will never be achieved in the system under which we operate until there is available to the elected members, whether they be of a legislature, of a city or of this federal parliament, the knowledge and the facts upon which they can challenge government and make it accountable. Accountability will follow knowledge and the capacity to challenge and scrutinize the actions of government and the executive branch of government, whether it be the elective or the appointive. That is the problem we face in Canada and which legislators face all over the world.

I agree with the hon. member on another aspect. We do not restrict this criticism to Ottawa alone. I am glad to say that in the province of Nova Scotia my old friend, Premier Regan, enacted a freedom of information bill. I think that is the first parliamentary institution, following the Westminster tradition, which has done so. I give him credit for that and I have told him so. I would have had a better bill, I hope, but at least it is a bill and a start.

I have every reason to believe that the legislature of that province from which the hon. member comes will shortly introduce a freedom of information bill. Mr. Davis of the province of Ontario has established a royal commission which is making enquiries into the matter, and white papers are being prepared elsewhere. This is essential because the people demand it. The people are frustrated, sick of and dissatisfied with the system of government that has controlled them so far.

I want to extend my thanks to hon. members who have spoken about the limited contribution I have been able to make in this regard. Many of us come to this institution with