

dures and practices followed by officers in the selection of new immigrants. The object of the crime, so to speak, happened to be a miserable manual nearly unreadable to a layman, published every three months, I think, and giving the rating of trades and professions according to their demand in Canada by area. In fact, that material is so confidential that when I wanted to find it in my own office to quote it in exact terms I never found it.

Hundreds of federal employees have been working with that manual in Canada and elsewhere for probably two years, a manual which, incidentally, and I emphasize this, is a key document for anyone wanting to do a good job according to the regulations on immigration.

It is really impossible for me to accept, and I am not the only one who thinks so, that parliamentarians who ask for it and need it for their work do not receive a copy as soon as it comes off the press. Personally I go even further. I do not understand why landed immigrants who sponsor a new applicant, or applicants themselves, are not explained the rules of the game and what their trade corresponds to in terms of the needs of this country. Abuse? The trickery of the system? That is a joke! My working experience with the public in the public service before my election tells me that the percentage of smart guys who would fool the system and lie, for example, about their occupation would be very low, everything considered, and second would be easy to check out.

Anyway, I assume that generally people are rather honest on our side and among the public. That frame of mind, that compulsion to withhold everything rather than release information is an insult to the intelligence of the people and members of parliament.

Here is another example just as commonplace. I cannot begin to understand why certain of our constituents have to take the time to write to us, asking that we get in touch with officials in some departments in order to find out why they were not hired for such or such a job awarded under a public service competition. I cannot see why we should be sent from one official to another, why everybody should lose expensive time, when it would be a simple thing to send a circular letter that would not flatly indicate: "Sir or Madam, you are not accepted". A blank space could be provided for various statements such as: "You have been awarded rank 464 of 5,000 candidates, unfortunately 100 only were hired." People would get a more concrete view, and very few would pursue the matter any further. After all, this is their most basic right.

Mr. Speaker, I would conclude with a renewed suggestion. Since I was first elected to this House three and a half years ago, I have heard it suggested by members from all sides that we should have freedom of information, as the point has been made in a rather moving way by the hon. member for Timiskaming (Mr. Peters).

I believe that we would have to be masochists to say that we do not have enough information. Our desks are full of all kinds of papers that are given to us at any moment of the day or evening. However, I prefer the subtle interpretation given by the hon. member for Fundy-Royal (Mr. Fairweather) who spoke of a continuous process, to which I would add the time dimension of information. Information is a living thing, and is valid, if I may say so, only as soon as it is printed.

Statutory Instruments

Some very factual and statistical documents must of course be used afterwards for a very long time, but the information is much more valuable when it is new. I will close with my hobbyhorse, which expresses in a way the fear of many politicians, men and women, and which, in passing, could be the symbol of the freedom of information, that is the wish that all our debates be televised for the public as soon as possible.

● (2120)

[English]

Mr. Harvie Andre (Calgary Centre): Mr. Speaker, I think it is fair to say that most of the time spent in this Chamber by members in discussion, in debate and so on, is spent on issues of the day, bills, and problems which come up that are important in terms of the circumstances of the day, or a problem which exists today.

Seldom and too infrequently do we have the opportunity to discuss a subject which perhaps does not affect us immediately and does not have an immediate effect on our constituents or the country, but yet which over the long haul may have a profound effect. Today we have that opportunity in discussing the report of the Committee on Regulations and Statutory Instruments by means of the motion brought forward by the hon. member for Halifax-East Hants (Mr. McCleave), which deals with freedom of information. As I have indicated, this is not of immediate importance to the people of Calgary Centre, Peace River, or any other constituency, in the sense that it will affect the way they live tomorrow, next week or next month. However, in terms of Canada and the type of government and society we will have in the future it is of vital importance.

It has been acknowledged by many people that to a great degree knowledge is power. There is, therefore, a very natural tendency on the part of the government to hoard knowledge in order to retain power. The hon. member who preceded me, the hon. member for Saint-Michel (Miss Bégin) said, and I think I am quoting her accurately, that the government could give more information than it is giving, and still remain in power. I agree with that statement. Yet that is symbolic of this concept that knowledge is power. There is in that statement a sort of recognition that the giving out of knowledge may in some way result in a weakening of the holding of power. Of course it is that fact which causes the civil service, the government and the cabinet to want to retain as much knowledge as possible and to be reluctant to give out knowledge.

On occasions such as today, when we have the opportunity to debate this subject, it is important to remind ourselves that this is a democracy and that it should be the people of Canada who should have this power. In a survey of the world situation it would appear that democracies as we have known them are diminishing in number. Whether or not they are being threatened may be a subject of debate. However, the people of Canada and the people who live in countries which are fortunate enough to be democracies are firmly convinced this is the best system. Nonetheless it is threatened.

Democracies can be retained in a serious way only if we retain in a serious way the fundamental concept that it is the people in democracies who have power. If they are to