

### Supply

women who work for the Public Service of Canada. Many of my constituents are in fact in that position. They are public servants and they work for the people of Canada. The message which they have received in the first 10 weeks of this Government has been very clear and unmistakable. At first it was, "Check it with Erik. Do not say a thing".

Ludicrously, ministries, including the chiefs of staffs of ministries, were not prepared, at the political level, to give any information to the public or the press without checking it with Erik. We heard the rather overwrought and over-reactive responses of the present Secretary of State for External Affairs (Mr. Clark) in his speech in Alberta and the directives he passed down. It got to the point where diplomats had to carry a ten-foot pole so that they would not get too close to members of the public or the press when they attended social events. During its first ten weeks in office, the Government sought to throttle the flow of information. It got to the point where the Prime Minister and his advisers finally realized they had gone too far.

● (1610)

What has the Government replaced that with? We must examine the statement of policy in the Prime Minister's release last Friday as well as its context. We should also bear in mind that the Government has learned a great deal from the Republicans in Washington whose desire it is to put the electronic media in the forefront, to discourage investigative reporting in the print media and to attempt to deliver one message per day.

I believe that in our vast and complex country with which the Government must deal and because of the fact that we have 70 or 80 missions abroad, it is impossible for the Government to function with one message a day. It is not possible to meet the concerns of dairy farmers, those concerned with acid rain, those who want to know its position on Cruise missiles and those who want to know about a small business program in Nanaimo. Too many people require too much information simply to wait in line for some information from the Prime Minister or whatever Minister is designated to deliver such information.

However, it is the Government's clear intention to have a managed and active policy on what it calls "communications". I suggest that this smacks of private sector thinking. I presume that it comes from some of the Government's advisers here. I would suggest to those people who advise the Prime Minister, such as Mr. White, that this is not the private sector. The Government of Canada is not the private sector and it cannot be managed like a private sector company such as Brascan or Imperial Oil.

When the Progressive Conservatives were in Opposition, they criticized the government for delivering a single message through its advertising strategy and for spending too much money for this purpose. However, the Government's letter to deputy ministers states quite clearly that deputy ministers and Ministers should get together to review current communication policies to ensure that "communications to the public are

managed effectively in accordance with the priorities of the Government". The Minister of Communications stated this very clearly in his speech. He said that objective information should be put out, which, in his view, would be information that would favour the interests of the Government, that is, in other words, the priorities of the Government. Those guidelines for public servants must be read in the context of a communications policy which wants government information to be in accordance with the priorities of the Government and to be carried by primary spokespersons.

#### [Translation]

There must be a primary spokesperson in each department and each region who will be responsible for departmental communications with members the press, members of Parliament, politicians and the general public. However, we all know, and I have experienced this myself, not simply as a politician, but also as a reporter, that the role of a primary spokesperson is to block information, not to facilitate access to it. For those who are sufficiently knowledgeable to be aware of what information they want, it is also necessary to know the details of a policy or of a government activity.

I was myself a correspondent for the *Financial Times of Canada*. This is a well-known newspaper with no socialist leanings, but it does a good job of discussing government policies. As a journalist of the 60s, I sat here in the press gallery and I did my job of communicating with Members of Parliament and public servants asking for explanations about government policy. If it had been necessary to always speak to the primary spokesperson of the Government, I would have wasted so much time that it would have been impossible for me to do my job, or else, in most cases, that primary Government spokesperson would not have had the necessary information to help me in my work and I would not have been able to meet my deadlines. Each week, I had to write articles to inform my readers, and it would have been nearly impossible for me to do my job.

In addition, as a journalist, I also had to know, not only things like how many tons of steel were produced the month before, which is factual, but what would be, for instance, the impact of the cutbacks just announced by Mr. Wilson, the Minister of Finance. What will be the impact on the Maritimes, for instance, of the policies recently announced by the Government? Will the regions without the backing of a strong private sector, be able to react with the necessary buoyancy to the action taken by the Government, as it relies increasingly on the private sector and not only on the public sector as was perhaps the case in the past?

These are typical questions which are often asked by ordinary people, journalists, members of the private sector, as well as politicians who want to form an opinion about Government policy.