

I have, Mr. Speaker, a very fine researcher. His name is Bing Ho. I asked him this year, because I was doing a study on Canadian-American relations prior to going to Washington, D.C., on a sub-committee, if he could investigate some information dealing with the Canadian-American beef trade and find it out for us and put together a booklet, a package. He phoned the civil service here in Ottawa, the Department of Agriculture, and day after day I heard him on the telephone going through the same sequence of questions such as: "Who are you? What do you want to know for? Who else will know this information? Where will it be used? When will it be used? How many other people are going to know?" All this before he could get the information.

Do you know what happened, Mr. Speaker? One day, perhaps through a slip of one of the civil servants, he found out that much of the information was shared with the American department of agriculture. So we decided to try another route. We bypassed the Canadian Department of Agriculture, phoned through to the embassy in Washington, D.C., and found a most helpful, co-operative, cordial group of people who not only gave us the information but said, "Look; what's your name and telephone number up there in Canada, because we know of other people who can phone you and give you further information?" Within moments we found that phone calls were coming in from the department of agriculture in the United States to give us information that is to be found in Canadian bureau of bureaucracy.

I simply say that this kind of example is one which should scare the living daylights out of Canadians. The fact is that we have in this country a shroud of secrecy over information that is paid for by the taxpayers but which the taxpayer cannot find out about. Like I say, there would be no problem if this related only to the Department of National Defence or sensitive areas of external affairs, but it exists in virtually every department of this government.

What my good friend from Hamilton West is saying is that the crisis of lack of freedom of information in Canada today has become so serious that at least let us enshrine in Bill C-27 that the public has a right to know what the council is doing. We have got to know, and we have the right to know, because we are supposedly a democratic country where people elect representatives to govern for them. The government of the day takes the attitude that once it has been elected it, alone, has the right to make decisions, instead of decision-sharing or taking the approach that the public has something to offer. It takes the position that it is wholly above reproach and has the right and the power to impose its wishes without the release of information so that its judgment could be "critiqued"—I do not say "criticized", but "critiqued"—and analysed by the public.

What we really need is a new understanding of the words "public servant". The public servant today has come to the view that somehow he is in this domain of perpetuating his own security. What we have to underscore is that he is, in fact, the literal part of the words "public servant" or "servant of the public". In other words, the whole concept of democracy

hinges upon this amendment; that is, we should begin to recognize that freedom of information is something for which provision should be made in the bill before us, and it ought to have been guaranteed before this.

• (1220)

At this stage in our history it is a shame that we still have to be clamouring, as an opposition party, on each and every bill, for the inclusion of a section which would ensure that the knowledge gathered through research is known to the Canadian people, and not only to the people who have been hired with taxpayers' dollars. I should like to deal with motion No. 3, which reads as follows:

—necessary to carry out its duties provided that without restricting the generality of the foregoing it shall meet at least once a year and minutes shall be recorded of all formal meetings.

If we look at Bill C-27 we see that the government has put forward the concept that there should be an advisory council with no obligations or requirements attached thereto. The amendment indicates that the minister's concept is good but can be made better by the addition of the observations of that group. It could be improved, also, by ensuring that the council has some specific obligations. To do otherwise allows the minister to have a cosmetic appearance. He has put forward the idea that there will be a council—with no assurance that it will ever meet, with no guarantee of minutes being kept, and no availability to what that council discussed.

The hon. member for Hamilton West said that we appreciate the fact the minister has come forward with a group of people who will be advisers. We should like to know what they are going to say or how they will have the privilege to find out what they have said. There should be a minimum requirement as to how often they meet. This minister cannot duck and dodge by simply putting on paper that there is one in existence, and then never call it into being.

Those are straightforward amendments, and I am sure the minister will not find them difficult to accept. From one side of his mouth, in standing committees, he told us that they were reasonable requests. He has also talked about consultation and the situation allowing more freedom of information. If he took that position at committee stage, he should have no difficulty taking it in the House of Commons. I should like to hear the minister tell this House that he finds motions Nos. 2 and 3 palatable. I should like to go along with the hon. member for Hamilton West and ensure that these motions be included in Bill C-27 when it is passed.

Mr. Derek Blackburn (Brant): Mr. Speaker, a lot has been said so far on motions Nos. 2 and 3. I do not want to duplicate what has been said already, but I should like to read into the record a few excerpts from a letter which was addressed to the Minister of Manpower and Immigration (Mr. Cullen), dated April 18, 1977. The letter was sent by Dr. Freida Hawkins of the University of Toronto, the department of political economy. It is my understanding that Dr. Hawkins is well known to the minister and his department. Probably she has written to