

*Freedom of Information*

national security, the government and the security services of this country will not be able to gather information in order to protect the freedoms we enjoy in this country; and despite the charges that are made, there is no country in the world that enjoys more freedom than we do in Canada.

**Miss MacDonald:** You should ask Dr. Treu.

**Mr. Dionne (Northumberland-Miramichi):** I do not have to ask Dr. Treu, who is being defended quite ably by the white knight from Peace River.

**Some hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Dionne (Northumberland-Miramichi):** Thank you. The second area where confidentiality of information and secrecy are necessary is national defence. The armed forces of the nation must have some assurance that their operational, tactical and strategic plans have confidentiality. Otherwise, there is no point in their making such plans. Of course, the same rule should apply to police and security force investigations.

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It goes without saying that no government can function at cabinet level without knowing that the discussions which take place within the walls of the cabinet room are confidential and privy to the members who participate therein. Also it would be extremely difficult to carry on international or federal-provincial negotiations completely in public. There has to be some confidentiality and a degree of confidence on the part of those who participate in the negotiations that what they say in those sessions will remain confidential. Obviously there must be some give and take. The nature of politics being what it is, the leaders of various governments who participate in these negotiations will want to know that the concessions or the compromises they make at the expense of a smaller constituency, in order to advance the interests of a larger constituency, will not be held against them.

Another area where secrecy is required is in the preparation of the budget. Of late we have seen the efforts of a rather innovative Minister of Finance (Mr. Chrétien). He attempted to consult other levels of government in the preparation of a budget and was charged with violating budget secrecy. That is somewhat of an about face in that it comes from a party which is calling for absolute openness. In the preparation of changes in monetary or fiscal policies, the government must be careful not to give away what it plans to announce on budget day, so that some individuals will not be able to take unfair advantage of that information.

Having dealt with the negative side of freedom of information, or the lack thereof, I should like to deal with the necessity for information. The public at large must have access to sufficient information to make rational decisions concerning the actions of governments at both federal and provincial levels, and in order to be able to make rational decisions in the casting of their ballots. It is only by this process that the electorate will have a full appreciation of the actions taken by government and will be able to make sensible and logical

[Mr. Dionne (Northumberland-Miramichi).]

decisions as to which candidate they should support during elections.

The public has an interest in the information accumulated by the government in the exercise of its responsibilities. In the final analysis, that is the only way we can have responsible government. Free elections will not mean very much if the public does not have access to sufficient information in order to make a rational and sensible decision on election day.

**Mr. Johnston:** The government told them that wage and price controls would not be brought in.

**Mr. Dionne (Northumberland-Miramichi):** We did not say any such thing.

**Some hon. Members:** Oh, oh!

**Mr. Dionne (Northumberland-Miramichi):** That is another example of the type of fallacy hon. members opposite have been spreading over the last four years because they were burned on their own policy of freezes.

Another reason for the public having access to information is that they can determine whether there is honesty and forthrightness in the administration of public good. If information is not made available, the public will not be able to decide whether the rumours, reports, stories, and so on, which they hear and read are accurate.

Whatever government may be in power, it is in its interest to make available all possible information in order for the public to make a rational decision concerning the actions of government. The federal and provincial representatives chosen by the people must have access to the information they require in order to carry out the responsibilities which were assigned to them on election day. It is impossible for any member of parliament or any member of a provincial legislature to make adequate representations on behalf of his or her constituents unless the detailed information on which to make those representations is available. They must have access to the information which the bureaucracy of the various ministries holds, whether it is correct or not.

**Mr. Johnston:** How about Treu?

**Mr. Dionne (Northumberland-Miramichi):** In far too many cases that information must be dragged out of the bureaucracy with a great deal of effort on the part of the representatives.

**Mr. Friesen:** And the cabinet ministers.

**Mr. Johnston:** And the hon. member for Peace River (Mr. Baldwin).

**Mr. Dionne (Northumberland-Miramichi):** Hon. members opposite seem to be interested in making representations from their seats rather than rising to make speeches. I hope they will listen to my remarks in order for them to learn something, and perhaps we will receive some consistency in the representations they make.

**Mr. Johnston:** Our trouble is that we have been listening.