

here between an individual freedom and another right of the state or the community.

A more careful examination of those three points I mentioned could justify, I believe, objections to the passage of this bill. It is obvious that a surprising volume of information is made available to the Canadian people as to the administration of their country. A day barely goes by, Mr. Speaker, without the editing staff of the various media getting numerous releases, either from government departments or from various government agencies. Releases are so numerous that the mass media are unable to publish or broadcast all of them.

Those releases deal with all aspects of the public administration in this country. Moreover, Mr. Speaker, papers are published by Information Canada at such a rate that I wonder whether an individual would be able to go through them on a regular basis.

As for ourselves, Mr. Speaker, we already find it difficult to go through the releases of all kinds that we get on the information coming from departments or various government agencies.

However, Mr. Speaker, our parliamentary system is another mechanism which contributes to the spreading of information, alerting public opinion on the administration of government affairs, and shielding what can be claimed too easily that is official secrecy.

The official opposition constantly has the opportunity to raise problems and put questions on the administration of public affairs, problems that seem to them as not being necessary for the public good, the better being of the people of this country. I must add, Mr. Speaker, that the opposition is doing a good job. I can understand that the three parties forming the opposition readily acquired extensive experience after several years on the other side of the House, enabling them to do a marvelous job, and thus help people to be better informed.

I would also like to add, Mr. Speaker, that the incredible number and the quality of mass media and information professionals also contribute to fulfill the right to information, a fundamental right of citizens and the community. The volume of information, the aggressiveness of the opposition, the number of media and the quality of information professionals are such that in Canada the right to information is in no way denied or restricted but quite on the contrary, highly promoted.

The second point I wanted to raise is the following—will the Inquiries Act up for amendment lose some of its efficiency if amended as under Bill C-206?

That Act, Mr. Speaker, gives the government powers to institute an inquiry on any matter relating to the good government of Canada, or the administration of any area of public affairs.

It seems obvious to me that if a provision like the one contained in Bill C-206 becomes part of the legislation, the Inquiries Act may lose some of its effectiveness.

Indeed, the immediate publication of the report on an investigation carried out under this act could nullify or seriously hinder certain procedures that should or could become necessary in view of the findings of the inquiry.

Inquiries Act

On the other hand, such a provision could make these inquiries more difficult. Witnesses could be much more reluctant to testify and to present certain papers in such conditions.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, we must think about the harm that could be done to certain people by a premature publication of the result of such inquiries.

In my opinion, our governments do not abuse the secret of State nor the secret of inquiries. Time has shown the validity of the arguments for postponing the publication of certain documents until such time when the results of the inquiries are made public.

The third point that I would like to make, Mr. Speaker, is that in opposition to the right to knowledge, there is also the right of the State to keep some secrets. This right is related to the right of the society to protect itself. This point could be carried as far as saying that this right can also become a means to protect individual freedom.

What I would call the right to secrecy is recognized in our administrative traditions. This right is recognized and easily justifiable by common sense alone.

For instance, one could wonder if parties in this House are shocked and think they ignore the individual's right to information when they make their caucus secret. They are not shocked, they do not infringe this right and I believe that this right to secrecy is justifiably recognized.

One could also wonder if the parties in this House are shocked or believe that they ignore the right to knowledge because the discussions of the Privy Council must be kept secret. I do not think so and I believe that this is justified.

Those who would be shocked about this would certainly not have had to take part in the government or are sure that they will never be asked to do so.

By analogy, it can be said that the publication of the findings or the report of certain inquiries must be left to the discretion of the one who orders it pursuant to the Inquiries Act, that is the Governor in Council.

It seems to me that we are all very conscious of the importance of public opinion in our society and of the influence of public opinion on the institutions that govern our society.

I think the primary occasion on which public opinion materializes can be identified as electoral campaigns. The electoral machinery, which in a way is a symbol of democracy in our society, gives the people the opportunity to convey their judgment to their leaders, at irregular intervals of course, but not exceeding five years. And that opinion of theirs on their government is conditioned by political parties in presence. It is a vast forum which the various political parties take advantage of to cross-examine the administration of the outgoing government.

The actual duration of those campaigns, Mr. Speaker, is not as provided for in the Canada Elections Act. In fact, as I pointed out earlier, our parliamentary system allows political parties to canvass all year long.

Consider for instance the relation between information as broadcasted by the media and the actions of opposition parties in this House. For instance, a program on the quality of ground beef has led the opposition parties to