

lines, the Opposition screams foul play. Yet those guidelines are designed to guarantee open and responsive government.

● (1700)

During the election campaign, we promised to review the guidelines on Government secrecy, especially those governing the role of public servants and their responsibilities when communicating with the Canadian public. We told the people that we would take action in this area. We did not wait for years as did the previous Government to establish guidelines on communications.

During the Cabinet meeting of November 23, the Prime Minister and all the Ministers reaffirmed our commitment that open and effective communication with the public would be an absolute priority for this Government. The Ministers also confirmed the Government's commitment to the principles contained in the Freedom of Information and the Protection of Privacy Acts. This is a positive, practical and realistic approach on the part of a Government which is open to the people. On the other hand, under our system of Government a Minister, normally chosen among his peers in Parliament, is traditionally accountable to Parliament, and only to Parliament, for the action taken by his department. This is the basic principle of ministerial accountability. In view of this, it is normal for certain restrictions to exist or for certain matters to remain confidential.

In spite of this, our Government will be known as an open government accessible to every Canadian citizen. If after 20 years in power, the Liberals were unable to establish clear and satisfactory guidelines on communications, they have only themselves to blame. If they refused to act and if we have inherited the results of their inaction in this area, they should be the first ones to congratulate us for the initiatives we are taking after less than three months in power.

However, to avoid giving out inaccurate or erroneous information, it is standard practice to provide guidelines for public servants asking them not to comment upon political decisions or certain documents which must remain confidential for security reasons. This is not censorship, but the provision of appropriate information to the people concerned. In this spirit, we can be certain of providing accurate information without distorting its meaning. Government information will therefore be clear and to the point. This is why the guidelines emphasize that all the contacts between public servants and members of the media must be on a non-confidential basis and for attribution by name. I am convinced that public servants should be prepared to openly provide factual information to the public and the media within their areas of responsibility that describes or explains programs and policies that have been announced or implemented by the Government. It is a responsibility and a duty to undertake to do that, as I do with my constituents and people from the media in my constituency.

### Supply

People wishing to discuss recommendations or advice as provided to the Minister or to question decisions that might be taken or business currently being addressed should get in touch with the Minister. We are elected representatives, we have received a very definite mandate from the people and it is our duty, especially the Minister, to answer and provide details on the policies of this Government.

Most importantly, we cannot have everybody at liberty to say what we are doing. This is something we have to tell the Opposition and the media, and let them comment if they so wish. We have been elected in a democratic way, and we are assuming our responsibilities, quite simply.

If in the past, guidelines such as guidelines no. 45 issued by the then Liberal Cabinet in March 1973 did put limitations on the information held by the Canadian government, the Conservative Government has attempted to remedy the situation in October 1979 by introducing Bill C-151, the Freedom of Information Act. Had that Bill been passed, it would have made Canada the first federal government with the British type of parliamentary system to have a legislation giving the public access to government documents. In July 1980, the Liberal Government introduced in the House of Commons Bill C-43, the information bill which dealt with the Freedom of Information Act and the Protection of Privacy Act. The legislation was given Royal Assent in July 1982. While Bill C-15 would have provided for an exemption for Cabinet documents, the Freedom of Information Act states it does not apply to such documents. The difference means that under Bill C-15, Cabinet documents would have been subject to provisions concerning judicial review, but they are not subject to such review under the Freedom of Information Act.

By unduly criticizing the guidelines issued by this Government, the Liberals simply confirm their disregard for some of their own bills.

Reference is made to muzzled civil servants, Mr. Speaker. Why, we make sure that public servants can communicate with the public under the guidelines issued by the Liberal Prime Minister who was in office in July 1981. Ministers, so he said, have a responsibility to establish, to delegate adequate powers of communication and information to their own staffs and officials. Public servants are not there to defend this party's policies. In this morning's *Globe and Mail*, columnist Simpson attacked the government. The government wants its officials to release factual information only and prohibits them from expressing opinions on future policies "in the making". As Hon. Members can see, the third part of these guidelines issued by the Right Hon. Prime Minister have not been changed by the Conservatives.

As to regional information, Mr. Speaker, it used to be badly circulated. As members of the Conservative Party, we want to make sure that officials in the field are fully informed about the various government programs or, when this information is not available, that they are aware of the avenues to get it. You