

*Access to Information*

I suggest that the Minister of Communications (Mr. Fox) has already done his part. He has brought with him some 16 officials to sit in the gallery and grace us with their presence. One wonders what they will be doing once the legislation is passed and how we will be able to function without their assistance in the gallery.

I must say that in a time of restraint the Minister of Communications has shown a far greater example of restraint than his colleague, the Minister of Employment and Immigration (Mr. Axworthy). The Minister of Communications brought only 16 officials with him. If we look at page 52E of the government telephone directory for May of this year, under Employment and Immigration it lists this Privacy and Access to Information Bill, C-43. There are some 27 names listed under this bill. It has already helped to create jobs in the country. If we have done something constructive here already in terms of putting Canadians to work, I am sure the minister will want to take his fair share of praise for that.

I listened with particular interest to the hon. member for Burnaby (Mr. Robinson) who was very flattering. He said that usually he has a very high regard for me. I must thank him for that. I must say that I usually have a very high regard for his remarks as well. However, this was perplexing. It was a surprise. I think every Member of Parliament was surprised by the hon. member's speech today because he is normally extremely sensible. The positions he takes are usually well-reasoned and sound. He often has a very significant contribution to make. However, I think each of us in the House of Commons was a little bit shocked to discover the reason the leader of the New Democratic Party on May 18 got up in the House of Commons to demand that the government bring this legislation back.

Let me read what the hon. member for Oshawa (Mr. Broadbent), the leader of the NDP, said as reported at page 17527 of *Hansard*. My colleague from Nepean-Carleton (Mr. Baker) had called upon the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) to agree to bring the bill back for an expeditious debate. The leader of the NDP said:

Madam Speaker, first of all, in response to the question raised by the Prime Minister I should like to say that we join completely with the Official Opposition in offering assurances that there would be most speedy debate on the freedom of information bill if the government would only bring it forward.

AN HON. MEMBER: One day?

MR. BROADBENT: There would be a one-day debate if the government would produce that bill.

I suppose members of the public who are interested in freedom of information and privacy could be forgiven if they thought that this commitment to a one-day debate, this pleading by the leader of the New Democratic Party to bring this bill back for speedy passage, was a sign that the NDP thought it was a good bill, that it was better to have privacy legislation and freedom of information legislation than not to. One would have thought they would have given their enthusiastic support. Now we know the reason for the pleading by the leader of the NDP on the floor of the House of Commons to bring the bill back. They wanted it brought back so that they could vote against it. That was their goal. They

wanted to be sure that when the history of freedom of information and privacy legislation is written, they will be recorded as saying they are opposed to the legislation.

The hon. member for Burnaby went on at some length heaping praise on himself and, as I say, often the praise that he would pour on to his own head would be merited. He went on at considerable length to say that he had on behalf of his party secured significant amendments which vastly improved the legislation, that it was much better than it otherwise would have been. He thought that this was very significant, that members of the House should be appreciative and that the Canadian people should be appreciative of this achievement which he had won on behalf of the NDP.

• (1650)

If these improvements were so significant, if the efforts of the NDP were so successful in committee, in terms of making improvements to the bill, in terms of winning a significant victory for Canadians, then why are they going out of their way this afternoon at 5.45 to vote against the bill? What is their purpose? Can he have been serious when he said that they made substantial improvements, that the bill is much better? By voting against the bill, the NDP will be recorded for all time as saying that they believe that the status quo is better than the legislation which is being brought in. They will be saying that they believe that having no freedom of information legislation is better than what will happen after this bill comes to a vote. They will be saying that they believe that Part IV of the Human Rights Act, which is seriously flawed, which has done nothing to protect the privacy of Canadians, is better than having the provisions in this bill.

Mr. Speaker, it may very well be that members of the NDP will be called away, that they will not be able to be in the House at 5.45 when the voice vote is taken. I want to indicate to my friend from Burnaby that members of our party, the Progressive Conservative Party, will be able and be very willing to assist in assuring that he can get his five members to have a recorded vote, to ensure that the NDP position on freedom of information and privacy is recorded as voting against the legislation, and as saying that they believe that the status quo is better than the improvements which a parliamentary committee and Parliament itself laboured itself to bring in on behalf of Canadians.

Let us have no confusion about it, Mr. Speaker. We believe, as my friend from Nepean-Carleton said, that there are flaws in the bill. We are disappointed that the minister chose to water down the bill, as related in particular to cabinet documents. We believe that the bill must be amended and improved. But we believe one other thing as well, and that is that this is a significant step forward. It is a step in the right direction. It does not go as far as we would like to see it go. It does not go as far as legislation will go when we have the opportunity to make amendments. But it is a vast improvement over what we have today.

How can anyone seriously say that having no freedom of information legislation is better than what is before us today?