

Not only does this break in the outflow of information and the equally pervasive overclassification of information in government hands work to the detriment of the democratic system, but as well it places conscientious civil servants in a difficult position. These people, who have a sense of what is right and of what the public has a right to know, are, because of an ingrained and overrestricted syndrome of secrecy on the part of the government, being forced to invoke their own brand of civil disobedience through the anonymous brown envelope. The continuous aura of secrecy creates a dilemma for them and they are forced to deal with it as best they can. That does not say a great deal for the openness of government.

As members of parliament seeking to get information to meet the needs of the individual Canadians whom we represent throughout this country, we probably all have our own set stories of ludicrous examples as to what can happen when this aura of secrecy is carried to the extreme. Just recently my own office attempted to get a copy of a magazine from a government department. We had read in the newspaper that a certain issue of the British magazine, *The Economist*, was available because of an article it contained on the Canadian economy. My office called for a copy of it and was told that the department had copies, indeed had lots of copies, but it took several calls back and forth to several different people because no one was sure if it was quite proper to release a copy of that magazine to me. That edition of the magazine was one of over a year ago.

Most Canadians are intelligent and mature people who are able to understand and sort out the myriad pieces of information with which they are bombarded every day. It comes at them through all sorts of media and in all sorts of situations. They absorb complex and technical facts constantly, but to date they have not been done in by this information explosion, and I do not expect that they will be.

I think it is time that the government recognized that they are able to handle information on their own and that they do not need the experts in government to do it for them. A little more faith in the ability of the ordinary Canadian would go a long way in changing the entrenched attitude of secrecy with regard to information that the government could provide. So I say, let us attempt to make such faith the basis of our freedom of information legislation.

Mr. Maurice A. Dionne (Northumberland-Miramichi): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to participate in this debate because I think it is a very important topic that is of concern to Canadians. I am somewhat surprised when I hear speakers for the opposition trying to lay at the door of this government the tendency to secrecy and the protection of government information. This is not something that can be dropped at the doorstep of one party or one government in this country, and that can be demonstrated by the fact that there are all across this country governments of various political persuasions which are less willing to release information than the federal government.

An hon. Member: There is only one federal government.

Freedom of Information

Mr. Dionne (Northumberland-Miramichi): I might remind the hon. member that there is also only one federal official opposition.

We have introduced in the House Bill C-12, the purpose of which is to provide legislative authority for the collection of certain statistics relating to Canada's petroleum industry in order, first, to enable the Government of Canada better to plan and develop policies for the management of Canada's energy supplies and resources and, second, to provide the Government of Canada with the detailed knowledge necessary to give authoritative assurance to the Canadian people that those policies are being effectively pursued in Canada.

That bill has been opposed by the official opposition, for what reason I do not know, but it is an attempt by the government to obtain information which can assure Canadians that information on the development of our natural petroleum resources is made available to the Canadian public. As I say, the bill has been opposed by the official opposition, so again it is not something that can be laid at the door of any particular party.

Someone across the way thinks it is a joke. I do not know what the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Clark) finds so funny, but if he continues to follow the course he has followed in the last month—

Mr. Hnatyshyn: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. Since the hon. member has inquired, let me tell him that the hon. member for Peace River (Mr. Baldwin) said that if the hon. member was defending us on a murder charge, we would be charged with attempted suicide.

Mr. Dionne (Northumberland-Miramichi): Mr. Speaker, hon. members opposite are the obvious experts in the House on suicide, at least political suicide. As I was saying, if the Leader of the Opposition continues on the course he has been following in the last few months, he will probably become the only Leader of the Opposition in Canadian history known for having lost his job by the seat of his pants.

Some hon. Members: Explain.

Mr. Dionne (Northumberland-Miramichi): If you want an explanation, it is because he talks all the time from the seat of his pants.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Dionne (Northumberland-Miramichi): There is an obvious need in this country, as there is in any country, for some secrecy, and I would like to deal very briefly with some of the situations in which secrecy or curtailment of information is required. Obviously, national security is one of those areas. The hon. member who preceded me referred to national security as being a nebulous term. It does not seem to me a particularly nebulous term. It seems to me to be a very important term because the security of our nation, after all, should be the first priority of any government. It is obvious that if there is no confidentiality of information with regard to