

Regional Economic Expansion

Papers dealing with international relations, the release of which might be detrimental to the future conduct of Canada's foreign relations; (the release of papers received from other countries to be subject to the consent of the originating country).

If members were given access to private papers and reports concerning other countries, the effect on our international relations could be detrimental. The fourth item reads:

Papers, the release of which might be detrimental to the future conduct of federal-provincial relations or the relations of provinces inter se; (the release of papers received from provinces to be subject to the consent of the originating province).

With the tremendously complex maze of federal-provincial and interprovincial papers, it is evident that if the federal government were to release these, there would be great difficulty in the negotiations between the federal and provincial governments. The fifth item is as follows:

● (1730)

Papers containing information, the release of which could allow or result in direct personal financial gain or loss by a person or a group of persons.

I believe this item in the criteria relates directly to the inquiry today by the hon. member for Bellechasse. If companies apply for this kind of assistance and their complete financial picture is released to the public, these companies, having given the government the information privately and confidentially, would very soon cease to have any faith in doing business with the government or at least in giving factual information to the government. Then No. 6:

Papers reflecting on the personal competence or character of an individual.

I shall not go into that; I am sure most members appreciate its significance. The criteria continue:

7. Papers of a voluminous character or which would require an inordinate cost or length of time to prepare.

Many of the questions put on the order paper require a tremendous amount of information-collecting. For instance, the government might have to ascertain how much of any particular item it has in its stores. Therefore, it seems to me it would be unreasonable to expect the government to go to all the expense of gathering and collecting such information.

8. Papers relating to the business of the Senate.

I understand we do not even refer to the Senate as such but, rather, refer to "the other place". If we start to release information through the government and the House of Commons relating to the Senate, we will change the relationship that has traditionally existed between this House and the other place.

9. Papers, the release of which would be personally embarrassing to Her Majesty or the royal family or official representatives of Her Majesty.

10. Papers relating to negotiations leading up to a contract until the contract has been executed or the negotiations have been concluded.

Likewise, this relates to the sort of situation we are debating this afternoon, a loan guarantee given to a company which has provided the government with confiden-

[Mr. Foster.]

tial information. Because of that trust, this information should not be released to the general public.

11. Papers that are excluded from disclosure by statute.

For example, those covered by the Official Secrets Act.

12. Cabinet documents and those documents which include a Privy Council confidence.

13. Any proceedings before a court of justice or a judicial inquiry of any sort.

14. Papers that are private or confidential and not of a public or official character.

15. Internal departmental memoranda.

16. Papers requested, submitted or received in confidence by the government from sources outside the government.

Similarly, I believe this latter item applies to the subject matter of the motion we are debating this afternoon asking for a House order to release information. I think this particular criterion has been applied to the release of documents. The motion presented by the hon. member this afternoon makes it clear that these papers do not fall within the category of those that can be released. The committee held hearings yesterday in Sudbury.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Foster: Yes, Mr. Speaker, I might say it was a very successful meeting and was devoted entirely to the Department of Regional Economic Expansion. Some consideration was given to the loan guarantee program and to other programs. A great deal of concern was expressed about the need for decentralizing the department and for having field officers able to assist applicants applying for a small loan guarantee or regional development grant directly, thus eliminating the expense entailed by engaging consultants and accountants. I believe there was unanimity among the committee members that this kind of assistance should be made available especially to people in the more remote areas. For the large corporation, decentralization perhaps is not so necessary since they have people on staff to handle detailed information and a trip to Ottawa to consult officials is not all that onerous.

We met many groups from various cities in northeastern Ontario and they, likewise, supported the idea of decentralizing this department. One group was from the Spanish River Indian Reserve and was represented by Chief Wilfrid Owl who made a presentation on behalf of his band and the 26 bands he represented in northeastern Ontario. Their experience with the loan guarantee program and the Regional Development Incentives Act has not been particularly favourable. They have received some assistance through the ARDA program as well as the Indian economic development fund, but the assistance received directly from the loan guarantee program and RDIA has been exceedingly limited.

In spite of the lack of direct liaison with the department, considerable progress has been made. The chief outlined the leathercrafts, woodcrafts and other development programs that have been financed through the department and the Indian economic development fund, including assistance to the forest products industry, small sawmill operations and pulp-cutting operations that are being carried out on his reserve. He indicated that the same kind of program has been implemented on other reserves in northeastern Ontario. Similarly with the ARDA program; he