

*Archives of Canada*

Access to Information Act and we had to come to the realization that it is not a very powerful Act, to put it mildly. The Act sets up an information commissioner who can take the Government to court, in a rather lengthy process, to try and get information. However, it does not do what people like the former Member for Peace River, Gerald Baldwin, hoped it would do when it was passed. The implication is that records of royal commissions, and national institutions such as Air Canada, CNR and the CBC would not be covered.

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For those of us who attempt to deal on a contemporary basis with some of these institutions, such as Members of Parliament, I think access to this information is quite important, as it is for historians and economic historians who are trying to understand the roots of some of these institutions. The roots of the CBC, for instance, is a fascinating subject. They flow from a great public campaign across this country to create an alternative to what was seen to be a dominant American radio system which was very much shaping our culture.

I think for the general history of our country, not just for the specific interests of people who want to look at the history of the CBC, it is quite important that the roots of that institution and its continuing progress over time will be something that can be investigated through full records as established in the Archives of Canada.

One can make the same case, I think, with respect to Air Canada and the CNR. The CNR, after all, has been a crucial connecting mechanism throughout our country, and goodness knows where would we be if it was not possible in the future for the chief archivists to see to it that the records of the CNR, and this host of other Crown corporations that we can barely count, are able to be brought into the Archives for the work of historians in the future.

When we consider the question of Royal commissions, of course, we are dealing with even more central institutions in the history of this country. Some of the most important policy making which has taken place in Canada has taken place through Royal commissions, whether we go back to the Gordon Royal Commission of the 1950s with its efforts to first identify the problem of foreign ownership, or the Rowell-Sirois Royal Commission of the 1930s, early 1940s in which many of the problems of federalism within our country were sorted out. Royal commissions have been crucial parts of our intellectual and political history. To say that we should not permit archivists to collect the information related, for instance, to the MacDonald Royal Commission, will make it very difficult for people 60 or 70 years from now to understand the free trade debate that is presently taking place in this country.

In addition to these questions of the jurisdiction of the archivists themselves, the Social Science Federation raises, as my colleague has, a number of specific clauses with respect to the Bill. These clauses can be dealt with in committee. We have had some indication from the Minister that he is going to look with some favour on attempts to rewrite some of these clauses that are considered to be too restrictive, to emphasize

secrecy too much, and hopefully the result will be an opening up of some of these points.

We have to take quite seriously the conclusion of a group like the Social Science Federation when it says:

In our view such wholesale destruction of records virtually precludes indepth scholarly assessment of the new judicial initiatives embodied in the Act and required for informed decisions on future policy.

They are referring, in this case, to attempts to analyse the changes to our legislation with respect to young offenders, something which we would not be able to look at carefully in the future and try to understand, if this Bill passed in its present form.

Continuing, if I could, with the Social Science Federation's quite strong critique, they are also very upset about some of the exceptions which cannot, under specific clauses, be collected by the Archives. They indicate:

These exceptions are couched in a language that is extremely broad and sweeping.

They continue,

The Access to Information Act, which the Archives must itself apply to all records in the possession of the Government of Canada, already stipulates a series of exclusions—

These are extra exclusions over and above those that are included within the present access to information legislation.

It is not just Social Science Federations, the broad umbrella bodies which have contacted us with their concerns, but also individual scholars who have said to us that the gaps which are created in the collection of material for archives will be quite damaging to future scholarship in this country. I am not going to repeat some of the detailed testimony which has been put on the record already by my colleague, but the academic researchers who have made this criticism include people like Reg Whitaker at York University who has written, I say for the sake of some of the Conservative back-benchers, one of the most critical and devastating studies of the Liberal Party of Canada, thanks to his capacity to be able to make use of the Archives effectively and dig out the sort of information which demonstrated the kind of pressures which that Party was subject to because of financial contributions and other forms of influence from business groups throughout this country.

We are talking about complaints by people who have very serious reputations in this country and have helped all of us to understand better the political and economic history which faces us as a country. I think that their warnings should not be simply dismissed.

I hope that as we move from second reading debate we will have the chance in committee to correct many of these deficiencies which would in their present form leave the Archives without the capacity to collect a great deal of very important information which both enriches our history and helps us as Members of Parliament to understand the questions we have to deal with legislatively. For instance, I think of some of the material that I worked through in our Archives dealing with the early history of the trade union movement and the way its growth was very closely related to the development of certain larger-scale corporations in this country.