

Government Administration

emanations from crown corporations such as the C.B.C., the C.N.R. and other bodies of perhaps lesser importance, such as the National Energy Board. The hon. member indicates by a nod of his head that they do. I am not sure that the language of the bill covers all the situations I have envisaged. None the less, this fact does not prevent me from supporting the measure in principle.

The Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) made a point, which I believe appealed to many Canadians, during the time which led up to that melancholy decision of late June. He made the point, and I think very effectively, that there should be more participation by the citizens of Canada with those who govern the affairs of Canada. I think a measure such as the one before us is designed to bring about exactly that type of liaison.

Without a measure such as this people tend to be reinforced in their paranoia about the conduct of governments in this country. They think government is run by big business and those who have access to certain ministerial ears. They begin to think that government is run for the advantage of the elite in Canada, rather than in the interests of all Canadians. Of course this is not correct in every aspect. The government and this parliament are quite capable of adopting altruistic measures of great benefit to the citizens of Canada. However, any time there is concealment of even one bit of information from the ordinary taxpayer, he does not draw the noble inference that it is not being done to protect somebody who has an interest about which he does not want his competitors to know. This is not the sort of inference drawn by the ordinary citizen. It is, rather, that if you close the door on information and shove it under the rug, as it were, it is because of some evil or malevolent purpose, and the information must be covered up.

The hon. member has made a point in moving this bill, and I am sorry it has not received the support of the spokesman from the government side. The hon. member for Surrey suggests that we should have some measure such as this in Canada, and he also made the point that if, because of its language, this bill does not exactly achieve its purpose, and requires some tempering or changing, we should get to work on it in some way instead of just waiting. How long are we supposed to wait—five years, ten years, 20 years, a hundred years? The bill does refer to ministerial powers and authority. These have been around for a long time and they will be with us for even longer.

Why should we be expected to wait? If we feel that the principle is good, and I certainly do, let us get on with this and make the necessary changes.

We launched, or hoped we launched a committee of this house into action, with all due solemnity, at the very start of this parliament, almost as though this were the most important single thing we could spend our time on during this new parliament. The committee is in existence, and a measure such as the one proposed by the hon. member for Surrey could be placed before it. It could deal with that measure, change its language if necessary, and reinforce it. If we want more participation on the part of the ordinary citizen in governing the affairs of this country, then I suggest a measure of this magnitude is in order.

Mr. Colin D. Gibson (Hamilton-Wentworth): Mr. Speaker, in rising to discuss the bill before the house I feel I should urge that there is a certain philosophy in this bill which, if carried to its ultimate, would be a perfect example of free information. The Prime Minister in his wisdom has sent out a task force to cover the whole of Canada and ascertain how the public can be better informed through the channeling of government information. It has been asked to suggest changes in the outmoded methods of providing information, thus making it easier for people to receive information. They will receive it simply by asking for it from information officers within the various departments. Surely this is the sound and wise course to follow.

The point in favour of free access to government documents seems to be based on the notion that large scale government secrecy leads to distrust and fear, and is incompatible with democracy. The point has been made that access to administrative information is essential in the development and continuation of democracy. The Swedish system has been pointed out as the model that we should adopt. One must consider the Swedish system, however, in the context of a central form of government in Europe, involving small countries where distances are not great.

I suggest that the Exchequer Court would have great difficulty in holding hearings throughout this nation to hear all the requests that might be made. I think the other course, that of the government going to the people and offering to provide channels of communication in the various ridings of this country,