

Freedom of Information

tion of some kind of monitoring agency to investigate the implementation of this legislation. On second thought, we have had to examine it more carefully.

We now propose following the kind of recommendations that flowed from the D'Avignon report, that that function could best be played by the Public Service Commission. It could look at these hidden costs and provide a significant report to the parliamentary committee in three years hence. It is an idea that is worth exploring because of the very nature of what we are dealing with here.

I want to emphasize that this is not only going to be a change for the citizens of Canada, but is going to be a significant change in the public service operations. We have to acknowledge that. As well, we shall have to find some way of protecting the individual public servant. After all, if he goes about his job collecting information and making it available and that information happens to prove embarrassing to somebody—the government, the opposition, individual corporations or others outside government—that individual public servant has to be protected for doing his job. We find that in this bill the individual public servant is not particularly well protected, and we want to ensure that consideration is given by the President of the Privy Council and the committee to ensure that that in fact is the case. We find the bill deficient in that particular instance.

● (2040)

We also find a concern—I do not know what we can do about it—in terms of information flow. I speak of information flow because right now the government really has, in my judgment, three kinds of information flow. We have information flow which is contained in what we might call the standard method of recording, that is, paper documents locked up in filing cabinets and classified according to various methods. That is the kind of information we usually think of.

However, there are two other kinds of information flow which are very important. The first is the question of electronic data processing and the data which is stored on computers. We have dilemmas, and we would want to examine with a great deal of care the way in which the government in the bill has dealt with this particular aspect. We feel that it probably deserves a separate definition of its own and probably separate considerations.

I want, for a moment, to tell the President of the Privy Council of some of the problems we see in this particular area. Let us assume, for example, that the Department of Finance has collected a lot of the data upon which decisions in government are used to make decisions in financial policy and that those data are in the form of a tape in a computer. Suppose I, as a citizen, want access to that data. You give me a tape containing that data. I do not have your kind of computer. The data is no good to me, and it may well be that to have access to that kind of computer is at a cost far beyond my capability. At the same time, if I get a print-out of the kind of data which is likely to be contained on that tape, it would actually be useless to me.

[Mr. Reid (Kenora-Rainy River).]

Let us consider also that the government may have some 25 or 30 programs which it runs off that data. Do I request and get a print-out of each one of those programs? Or can I even request the government to give me a print-out of that data using my own programs written on the government's own computer? Yet that may be the only way to use that data properly. So, I would like to ensure that the President of the Privy Council comes to the committee having given some considerable thought to this item. I believe it to be of fundamental importance because I am now told that about 55 per cent of the data which the Government of Canada has, is contained by this kind of information method, which means that unless one has access to considerable computing power, it is absolutely useless. We do not want to end up in a situation where, because the government has converted to a computer system of information storage and retrieval, the legislation itself is worth nothing and is a dead letter. So, I believe that is an important point we want to have followed up in considerable detail.

Another point to make sure that freedom of information is worth while is the matter of indexing. We cannot get the information if we do not know it exists.

Mr. Baker (Nepean-Carleton): Hear, hear!

Mr. Reid (Kenora-Rainy River): That means we really have to pay much more attention, it seems to me, to the question of indexing than is in the bill. I recognize that the government has used the model which was contained in part IV of the Human Rights Act, and I think that as far as that model went it was appropriate because it was dealing with a definable, quantifiable sort of information. What we are now dealing with are all kinds of information which the government has acquired, and therefore we want to ensure that the indexing system which is developed has at least two categories, that it is as comprehensible as we can possibly make it and, second, that it is updated as urgently as possible.

I also feel that to ensure that Canadians from across the country have access to the government data bank the government must find a means of disseminating this information throughout the land. It is not good enough to say that people can get information only if they come to Ottawa, and in my judgment it is also not good enough to say that people can get data only if they go to an office of which we have perhaps one in each province. I recognize the dilemma in terms of costs, but at the same time I urge the President of the Privy Council to consider utilizing the Post Office again as we have in part IV of the Human Rights Act. I think it is worth considering that. Because of the nature of this country I feel that we cannot keep information exclusive to only one region or to favoured regions. We must, in our legislation and in our actions, make sure it is available to as many people as is humanly possible.

I want to talk at this point about costs. The green paper of 1977 indicated a cost ranging at that time between \$10 million and \$11 million per year. The paper which was presented by the President of the Privy Council with his legislation indicat-