

*Private Members' Business*

the House of Commons during the first five days after it resumed sitting.

If Bill C-309 was made votable and passed, the results of all public opinion polls commissioned by federal government bodies would become public in a very timely fashion. This prompt disclosure would make the results available while the information is still relevant to the current concerns of the public and is what the Canadian people are demanding.

Although I hope I am wrong, I predict Liberal members will speak against the bill. Members opposite know very well that they made election promises to "make open government the watchword of the Liberal program". I doubt they are willing to live up to that promise.

This reluctance of the Liberals to honour their red book promises was clearly demonstrated earlier in the year when they were the only members from any party to vote against open government by defeating Motion No. 304. I proposed this motion. It would have opened up Parliament and crown corporations to scrutiny under the Access to Information Act. I was told it was not to be passed at that time because the whole question was under review and massive changes were to be made to the Access to Information Act. Everyone agrees that it needs revision. I wonder if we will hear the same reasons now.

Even though Liberal members had been given assurances that M-304 would not breach the confidentiality of their offices or disrupt the competitive edge of crown corporations, Liberal members unanimously voted against that motion. This was especially strange considering that several members had told me privately they favoured the motion and thought it was a great idea. We all know what really happened. Instead of allowing their members to vote freely on the matter, the top brass stepped in and cracked the party whip. Even though the chief government whip has given his word to the House that Liberal members are allowed to vote with their consciences on private members' business, those members are told what to do and as always they do it.

I would now like to anticipate the line of argument from my colleagues opposite. I predict they will say that since they have been in government Treasury Board policies on communications and information management have been changed in order to address the problems of disclosure of public opinion research. I predict we will hear that these guidelines and the promises of the public works and government services minister make Bill C-309 unnecessary. The problem is already solved, they will say, but this is not correct.

• (1110)

It is true the change in the Treasury Board guidelines tinkered with the old Mulroney system but this did not mean the problem

was solved. It was not and the government knows it. News clippings abundantly reveal the continuing problems with the new and improved Liberal system. Two headlines in the *Globe and Mail* recently say it all: "Liberal poll results rules much like the Tories", "Liberals will still allow polls to be kept secret". A *Winnipeg Free Press* article entitled "Imitating Mulroney" says:

Public Works Minister David Dingwall called the new guidelines a "breakthrough". In fact, they are little more than Brian Mulroney's policy warmed over with a little red sauce for artificial flavour. These flimsy guidelines will not require ministers to reveal information gathered at public expense, if in the opinion of the minister that information is considered advice to the government.

What does it mean, advice to the government? By tradition, advice must stay locked up in a bomb-proof vault until the minister passes on to a better place or until the paper it is written on turns yellow and disintegrates.

Let me move on to a very interesting article that was published in the normally Liberal friendly Toronto *Star* after the new Treasury Board guidelines were put in place. Its title is: "Liberals restrict access to poll results". It reads:

—previous Conservative governments were attacked for keeping taxpayer paid for polls secret, including constitutional polls. Now, the Liberal government seems determined to do an even better job of delaying and hiding poll results.

We are talking about millions of dollars of taxpayers' money being spent on public polls and their findings not being made open to the public or to this House. The author of this article, Ken Rubin, correctly calls the government's new access scheme fraudulent. He describes the flawed new process as follows:

1. The lengthy up to 90 day period for publication of poll reports goes far beyond the already too long 30 day release period possible under the Access to Information Act. There will be instances in which publication is well after 90 days.
2. The up to 90 day period for publication release begins only after a final written report is received from the pollsters. That's even though the polling results are immediately conveyed—sometimes months earlier—orally or in draft written form to the government.
3. A summary report of polling results could be all that is published, leaving out the guts of the research usually found in the technical tables.
4. Some polls still will be kept secret through applying partial or total exemption of poll results under the Access to Information Act.

It will be up to the minister to decide.

5. The Treasury Board directives formally encourage departments to consider applying for exemptions under the Access to Information Act. This policy endorses the view that polls are something other than publicly paid for, routinely released results of public response to government commissioned questions.

6. The Treasury Board's practices will make more progressive federal departments think twice before publishing certain "sensitive" poll data; after all, departments have to go to the Treasury Board to fund their polls and focus group research.