

sions of cabinet or the cabinet committee should be the subject of an exemption. I emphasize that the standing joint committee was composed of members of all parties represented in the House, as well as representatives from the other place. Therefore, on this particular aspect there was a parliamentary consensus in the full sense of the word.

Even among expert groups interested in the subject of government openness and freedom of information, there is a recognition that cabinet documents and cabinet procedures are worthy of special treatment. I refer in particular, to the model bill on freedom of information prepared in March of 1979 by the Canadian Bar Association. That model bill listed the exemptions which the Canadian Bar Association felt should apply to limit public access to government documents. The first exemption listed is the one dealing with cabinet records. In other words, the Canadian Bar Association probably felt that among all classes of information needing protection, cabinet records should stand out prominently.

This brief overview of the practices followed in other jurisdictions, of the constant position adopted by succeeding governments in this country, and of the views of the legal experts which I have given in the last few minutes, will show there has been over the years a consensus that the workings of cabinet should not be made public in a premature fashion, and that they should not be made public to the point where it would make the reaching of decisions a most difficult, if not impossible process. Therefore I would recommend that this House, in all its wisdom, reject the motion put forth by my good friend from Vaudreuil. As I said earlier, he put forward this motion with the best of intentions, with the best of motivations and with sincerity.

I wish to underline that the government is committed to the concept of open government. It has introduced legislation on access to information which is now before this House. We wish to proceed with that legislation and to comply with its spirit. Indeed, earlier this afternoon, in reply to the point of order of the hon. member for Leeds-Grenville (Mr. Cossitt), I dealt with the fact that answers tabled in the House, in response to questions on the Order Paper, must comply strictly with the provisions of Bill C-43, notwithstanding that the bill is not yet law. I think it is a very commendable directive which the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) has given to the government and to all of us on this side of the House.

Cabinet confidentiality should be preserved if we are to preserve the integrity of responsible British parliamentary democracy in the traditional mold.

[Translation]

Mr. Raymond Savard (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Public Works): Mr. Speaker, in answer to the hon. member for Vaudreuil (Mr. Herbert) I will have to make a brief review of the history of the Department of Public Works. First of all, however, I want to congratulate him for his interest in the Department of Public Works and at the same time try to reassure him and dispel some of his concerns.

Department of Public Works

If I may, I will go back a number of years to make a brief review of public works. In 1841—and that is quite a while ago of course—the Bureau of Public Works was created as an organization of the province of Canada, much in the same way as our Crown corporations today. In the early days of confederation the departments of marine, fisheries, railways and canals shouldered most of the responsibilities previously belonging to the Department of Public Works.

In 1879 the minister of public works was responsible for administering and directing the execution of all public works, except in cases specifically identified in other statutes. In its 1962-63 recommendations on real property the Glassco Commission pointed out that quite a number of departments were responsible for real property services. It recommended that DPW have exclusive jurisdiction over property management, excepting National Defence; over planning and supervision of all construction works required by the departments, as well as hiring the required experts. It would also be in charge of management of real property, planning of federal real property, acquiring such property through purchases or rentals, disposing of surplus real property, and applying the Municipal Grants Act. The costs were to be charged to departments and organizations in exchange for accommodation and real property services.

In 1964 a committee of senior officials was set up to study the recommendations of the Glassco Commission and emphasize the need for establishing a central real property index, the advantage of including all annual outlays for real property in the maintenance and operations budget of client departments, the merit of profitability studies—build ourselves or contract out—the excessive dispersal of real property acquisitions among six large federal departments and organizations, and the waste of resources resulting from keeping professional and technical staff in several departments.

In 1965 the consulting firm of Peat, Marwick and Mitchell made a thorough study of DPW operations. Their recommendation was to consolidate the internal management of the department. They suggested three possibilities: first, two operational groups, housing design and construction, each supported by district offices under a general directorate for planning policies at the central administration; second, six nearly independent regional offices directed by a small central administration responsible for policies and co-ordination; third, keeping a centralized department with specific responsibilities for planning and operations shared among the central administration and the regions.

In November, 1965, Treasury Board approved a new structure for DPW. This would give the department a solid base to delegate a large part of its responsibilities and operational authority to field offices and would satisfy the accounting requirements between DPW as a service department and its client departments. Following the consulting firm's report, DPW suggested that Treasury Board should appoint it the