

*Access to Information*

concern about the use of that section. I am pleased to see that section 41(2) of the Federal Court Act is to be repealed.

My colleagues in the House will be commenting upon some of the difficulties in obtaining information with respect to defence activities which may adversely affect the population of this country. One need only point to the recent shocking revelations in Gagetown, New Brunswick. I can assure you, Mr. Speaker, that my colleagues will be speaking further on that subject.

There has been a veil of secrecy cast over the activities of the RCMP. I would suggest that one of the reasons for that secrecy and lack of accountability in the past is that there have been violations of the law, and by opening up the activities of the RCMP security service to greater scrutiny we will ensure, I hope, that never again will the rule of law be eroded in this country and never again will wrongdoing and law-breaking on the part of the RCMP be condoned or accepted.

One need only look at the prison system in this country, which the subcommittee on penitentiaries insisted must become open and accountable; even today it still remains one of the bastions of secrecy in Canadian society. It is still a fact that in order to obtain vital information about what is going on in the penitentiaries, it is necessary to obtain this information, in some cases, through illicit channels. To find out what has happened in the Dorchester Penitentiary, for example, it would have been desirable to receive this information from the minister—and, hopefully, it will be required under the freedom of information legislation. Yet it was necessary to obtain a document through illicit channels which showed that there were serious problems at that institution.

One need only look at the abuse of opinion polls in this country by the present government and, I suspect, by the previous government as well, the right of Canadians to know exactly how this particular information is being collected and what the information is in order that we may all join together in formulating policies based upon the assessment of that information, not just restricting that information to government.

Finally there is the question of the War Measures Act. As was pointed out yesterday by one of my colleagues, we still do not have, over ten years after the event, information on which that decision was based, namely, the decision to sweep away fundamental civil liberties not only of the people of Quebec but of all Canadians. That decision, I suggest history will show, was one of the most shocking abuses of government power which has ever taken place in this country.

There is no question that in Canadian society there is a need to end the pervasive secrecy which exists, and that is the avowed objective of this particular legislation. In addition, there is no question, particularly as we approach that famous year of 1984, that we must ensure that the government does not have sweeping and arbitrary powers to intrude into the private lives of Canadians. That is the avowed objective of the privacy legislation which is being put forward for second reading today. We must recognize the fundamental right of Canadian citizens to prevent the explosion of information,

which is at present taking place in this society and which, in many cases is being abused, from being extended far too widely. That is one of the avowed purposes of this bill, as I said. Big Brother must be kept out of the lives of Canadian citizens. We have seen too many incursions.

The door has already been opened with respect, for example, to abuses of wiretapping under the Official Secrets Act. The Solicitor General (Mr. Kaplan) eagerly jumped on the bandwagon of the RCMP when they said they wanted to invade the right of privacy of first-class mail of Canadians. We have been waiting in vain for months and months for the evidence which he promised to bring forward justifying that invasion of the privacy of Canadians, and I suggest that that evidence does not exist. These trends are dangerous, and any legislation which can effectively deal with invasion of privacy will, I hope, assist us in checking them.

We also want to look at certain related areas when we talk about freedom of information and the right to privacy. We must look, for example, at the Official Secrets Act, an act which has been recognized by many as being archaic and repressive. I suggest, in looking at the repeal of that document, that we ignore the recommendations of the McDonald commission on this subject, because if they were to be accepted we would not be very much further ahead than we are now. As I said, we need to repeal the Official Secrets Act, which should be replaced only where necessary by much more restrictive provisions. It is important that the right of access to information be extended to the private sector where the activities of the private sector directly affect the interests of the public. For example, I need point only to the importance of extending this to the private sector where the private sector is engaged in the testing of chemicals in abuse of our environment, and also if the private sector has been involved in tests of products which they then attempt to flog on the Canadian market. Surely we have a right to know the results of those tests. Workers who work in the factories, plants and offices of the private sector have a right to know the conditions under which they are working. That principle must be recognized in any freedom of information legislation which is to be truly comprehensive.

● (1610)

We must look at opening up the processes of government. Surely it is not good enough to say that information which has been obtained is to be extended after the fact. The next great battle in this country will be the battle for sunshine laws to open up the processes of government, to open up the meeting places of government to ensure that Canadians are entitled to watch as those decisions are being made and not be provided with the information only after those decisions have been made.

We in this party take that obligation very seriously. We will be pursuing strong and effective sunshine laws to open up the processes of government at the earliest possible opportunity. That would include the obligation to look very seriously at the actions of the lobbyists who have in many cases pervasive and sweeping influence on the process of government. We want to