

the other day, he was speaking for the members of the committee, because there was no objection registered.

Hon. Mr. Flynn: Not necessarily.

Hon. Mr. Martin: Senator Flynn says not necessarily, but I should think if that is the case then we ought to have an expression of view during the course of this debate.

The Standing Senate Committee on National Finance spent some time in an examination of Information Canada. If these committees are to be taken seriously, and I take it that they are, and if their work is to be commended for its thoroughness, then I don't think we should just allow the report to be tabled by the chairman without some comment. While I may not necessarily agree with the forum for discussion which Senator O'Leary proposes, nevertheless I do think that we should not hesitate to comment on this report. Senator Everett took us through the report in its important sections. There has been a very wide discussion of the report—

● (1430)

Hon. Mr. Flynn: Not yet.

Hon. Mr. Martin: In the major newspapers and on television, most of it in my opinion complimentary. The report itself is not by any means a complete endorsement of all that Information Canada is doing, or has done. The report, I believe, is sound and logical. It has met the objective that members of the committee set out for themselves. I think it is a unique report and a valuable report. Its style has managed to reduce the complexities and the serious shortcomings, admittedly, of the government's information operations to language that is understandable and, perhaps for the first time, it has set out the essential requirements for overcoming those shortcomings in practical and workable proposals.

Recommendations and conclusions 3(b), 3(c), 4, 5 and 13 of the report form the essential foundation for action, it seems to me, toward the achievement of the effectiveness not only in Information Canada itself but across all government programs of information, the very objective that Senator O'Leary said this institution should have. The important recommendation is No. 1, and I do not think it quarrels with what Senator O'Leary said would be the kind of situation a new administration under Conservative auspices would seek to establish, having clearly eliminated the present one. This recommendation No. 1 proposed that there should be an act of Parliament defining Information Canada's authority and responsibilities. All other recommendations in this group of the key recommendations are, of course, substantial to the whole proposal itself.

The report points out that Information Canada's responsibilities to evaluate departmental information programs, to see that the maximum techniques, to use their word, are being used to meet the public need, to continually watch for and correct overlap and wastage in both the hardware and software of information within the government and to strive for the improvement of quality across the service as a whole, become realistic only when coupled with the means—that is, the clout—to make it happen as is recommended in the fifth recommendation of the committee, which reads:

[Hon. Mr. Martin.]

Information Canada should act as the agent of the Treasury Board in screening the information budgets of all departments and agencies and advise Treasury Board regarding expenditures on information programs proposed by departments.

That is the very important function that Senator O'Leary said a real information board, to use his language, should be engaged in doing.

The role of Information Canada in providing professional leadership in concert with other appropriate central agencies, such as the Public Service Commission and the Treasury Board Secretariat, for the upgrading of professional standards of information officers of government is a logical and proper investment in improving the quality of the service rendered.

Senator O'Leary said the committee should call these young information officers before the committee to be asked why they produce so much material. The committee had that opportunity. There was nothing to preclude the committee from calling officers. As a matter of fact, an examination of the report shows that many of the personnel in Information Canada, including the minister, were called before the committee. All that Senator O'Leary is saying is that more should have been called. That is why I regret that with his great knowledge and professional skill he was not on the committee.

Finally, the clear and open display of the costs of information services for each department in the annual blue book of estimates on Information Canada's role in defining information for this purpose is in itself a significant and welcome new information instrument and one that is long overdue. It does not do some things that Senator O'Leary suggested. Admittedly, when Information Canada was first conceived there was concern that we would be using this instrument for the purpose of propagating the work of individual members of the government. That has not happened.

Hon. Mr. O'Leary: Aren't you sure that is happening?

Hon. Mr. Martin: I certainly do not believe that is happening and this report is my authority for saying so.

Hon. Mr. O'Leary: I see what I see. I have speeches on my desk right now that were made three or four weeks ago. Why are they on my desk, and who paid for putting them on my desk?

Hon. Mr. Martin: I cannot say why they are on Senator O'Leary's desk. But that statement is not proof of what Senator O'Leary said, that Information Canada, in its present form, is for the purpose of propagating the work of individual ministers. I say this report does not serve as the authority for making that statement, and I do not believe that to be the case.

Hon. Mr. Flynn: That is only one of the recommendations concerning Information Canada.

Hon. Mr. Martin: Most of the recommendations—and they are major recommendations which are supported by the government—when implemented will supply the essential parameters. They will set out the limits of responsibility which Senator O'Leary speaks of and they will make it possible for Information Canada to do those things for which it is best suited.