

Access to Information

which really did not go to the meat of the bill but, rather, were calculated, I gather, to tire out members of the committee so that they would get to the stage where they were sick of saying, "Well, we will not sit here for another two and a half hours tonight; our constituents expect us to be doing a little more than that".

I say thank God for the political, moral and intellectual commitment of the minister to this particular bill, or it would not be seeing the light of day today.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Cullen: I was frankly surprised that the hon. member for Nepean-Carleton (Mr. Baker) made the suggestion that the minister was not intellectually committed to this particular bill.

Mr. Baker (Nepean-Carleton): I said that he was.

Mr. Cullen: I think, in fact, that the party, and particularly this minister, were intellectually committed to it. The hon. member for Nepean-Carleton, having been a minister, will know of the difficulty facing a minister dealing with a piece of legislation which is controversial, when he is endeavouring to get time in the House of Commons so that his particular bill can be debated, a bill as important as this one, only to find that hour after hour is spent at the committee stage. When the amendments of the hon. member for Burnaby (Mr. Robinson) were not allowed, we then heard the threat: "We will bring them all back in at the report stage and go through them again".

What kind of commitment could the Minister of Communications (Mr. Fox) bring to his House leader at that time? We have held a long, thorough debate. God knows, we have been here for a year or a year and a half. We have had lots of time. But the minister had no guarantee that the hon. member for Burnaby would not raise all the amendments that were considered by the committee and not accepted.

The hon. member for Nepean-Carleton had the role of a House leader, but what House leader in his right mind would say to the minister: "Go ahead, we will take our chances; we will use up all our time in the House on your bill while we listen to the hon. member for Burnaby come out with his pet theories as to how this particular bill should be passed"?

I say thank God not only for the minister but also for the media, because if there was a role played by the media on this issue, it was a positive one, and that was to highlight the fact that the bill might be dropped and that there might be difficulties in getting parliamentary time for the bill. They attacked the attorneys general for the provinces when they came up with what I believe has been called an omnibus bill by the hon. member for Nepean-Carleton, but who are suggesting almost an impossibility if we are ever to get an access to information bill through the House. The media highlighted the difficulties, the stupidity and the manner by which this could never be made to work.

There is another hurdle for the minister to overcome, because now we hear the opposition parties saying: "Forget the

provinces; act unilaterally". It is all right when they are in favour of the piece of legislation, but it was not so hot when we were dealing with the Constitution. But they wanted us to go ahead unilaterally. So the minister, to his credit, when back to the fight and said; "This bill is important; we are committed to it".

Many meetings were held with the Liberal caucus where we discussed some of the amendments. We quite candidly said that we would allow a few of the amendments, for which the hon. member for Burnaby is prepared to take credit, and maybe we could get on with the bill. They could just as easily have been moved by the minister or by someone picked from this caucus as they had already been thoroughly discussed and debated by the caucus. But rather than do that, we said let us give the hon. member some credit, let us give him some kudos, if that is what he wants; but for heaven's sake, let us get this bill passed.

I recently had the privilege of speaking with Ged Baldwin, whose name has been mentioned here, and he indicated that this bill is not perfect. Nobody suggests that it is perfect. The minister himself has said that it is not cast in stone. There are some changes which can be made, and there will be a review; but we need this bill and we are not just taking a timid, tender step at this particular stage. We have, in effect, two bills in one. We have the access to information section and we have the privacy section initiated, I believe, by the hon. member, who will probably be speaking next on that particular subject. So I say full marks to the minister and full marks to the government for bringing this particular bill forward.

I was a little surprised to hear the hon. member for Nepean-Carleton say, "we will form the government after the next election". First and foremost, he is making a big mistake. Once again, the Conservatives are underestimating the strength and resilience of the Liberal Party. So I do not think he should pre-judge. I was also surprised that the hon. member for Burnaby had the gall to suggest that his party would form the government. They will be lucky if they have a rosy blue rump down here in the Tories if they ever get to be in power, because that is not the party which will win the election.

I heard the hon. member say: "My leader when in my riding said that when we come back we will have this judicial review". Well, that is a nice promise to make during the election, but let us judge it by the facts. The Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Clark), the former Prime Minister, said the same sort of thing: "We will move the embassy, we will dismantle Petro-Canada, we will fire 20,000 civil servants".

Mr. Baker (Nepean-Carleton): Sixty thousand.

Mr. Cullen: Sixty thousand, or 20,000 a year I am sorry. The hon. member for Nepean-Carleton would like to think it is only 20,000, but I thank him for correcting me. It was 60,000 civil servants.

Then there was mortgage insurance protection. Mr. Leonard Shifrin has gone over the figures as to what that would have cost. It is now up to \$6 billion on an annual cost basis.