

While it is easy to reach for the club of totalitarianism in order to beat down government initiatives in the provision of information, the issue in Canada is more prosaic. A central information agency providing all kinds of information to all Canadians is less of a threat to the liberties of citizens than it is a threat to efficient dissemination of information.

As The Task Force on Government Information stressed, the characteristics of various political systems and the inter-relationships between government bodies and levels of government have enormous influence on the nature of social communications:

"The legislative, the governmental, the judicial and the administrative branches of government—through their separate natures, activities and inter-relationships—all determine certain types of the information flow. They condition the flow of information from other sources. The information flow in a federal system is clearly different from the one in a unitary state. In Canada, the open federal-provincial constitutional conference generates a type of information that, in a unitary state, could not exist.

States are becoming increasingly involved in social communications. It is worth remembering that however important the state becomes in this field, it remains one among many participants, and the other participants never stop influencing it".

(To Know and Be Known, II, 15)

Canada's open society leaves no room for an Orwellian Ministry of Truth, and despite the cries of the more extreme parliamentary and press critics, Information Canada is ill-suited to such a role. Until jackboots, torture chambers and the 2 a.m. knock on the door become everyday features of Canadian life, such a notion is absurd. But, as the above quotation indicates, information flows in all directions, from every conceivable source to every conceivable recipient. A central information agency, even for federal activities, would be more likely to produce an artificial and unnecessary bottleneck rather than a rational path to popular enlightenment.

That there is overlapping and waste in the overall information activities of government departments is irrefutable but this does not deny the necessity of having these information activities. Farmers, processors, wholesalers and retailers must know what the Department of Agriculture is up to. Veterans must be informed of the legislation affecting their benefits. All citizens must know how changes in tax policy affect them. One central information bureau may have the superficial virtue of being the ultimate in rationalization, but rationalization is not an automatic guarantee of efficiency. It is more likely that a central information agency would develop along the lines of early models of the universe, with cycles and epicycles of sub-agencies and bureaux established to deal with the multitude of information areas, with the inevitable creation of a ramshackle, unworkable bureaucratic monster.

It is far better, we think, that Information Canada refrain from taking over the public relations and information duties of such large departments as Agriculture or Industry, Trade and Commerce, and concentrate instead