

Government Orders

In a research discussion paper involving the statute prepared by the Library of Parliament it acknowledges that the Treasury Board chairman, a minister in this House, has said to the committee that looked at this bill: "Do not worry because you can use the Access to Information Act". It is that wonderful statute that permits us to gain access to government information. I know that statute is being successfully used all across government. I do not want to underestimate the effectiveness of that statute in many areas. But there are problems.

I want to point out that counsel to the Standing Joint Committee on Scrutiny of Regulations, as a result of the way the Public Service replied to our committee in relation to getting information about the Stelco remission order, decided to make a request under the Access to Information Act.

Here we have a committee of Parliament seeking out the information that it must have to do its job and using a statute that was created for the general public. It was not created for parliamentarians nor for committees of Parliament. We thought we would try it. The public servant involved said: "We are sorry we cannot tell you to whom we paid the money and how much it was". That is what the Access to Information Act yielded to this Parliament: zero.

It is a sham when this minister tells a committee of this House: "Do not worry. You will get your information under the Access to Information Act". If the minister really knew what was happening he would be embarrassed. He is either trying to fool us or he has been fooled himself. I like to think that he really does not know.

I hope he will know and I hope he will take into consideration the remarks that I and other colleagues have made in relation to that. The Access to Information Act will not work. If he thinks it does I would like to debate that. I am sure many other parliamentarians would also like to debate the subject.

• (1300)

If he is so confident perhaps he ought to be prepared to amend the Access to Information Act to link subclause 16(1) in this bill that says that the Governor in Council can do whatever it wants on a piece of paper

without a statutory instrument, without a regulation, without passing a law. Subclause 16(1) would be addressable by all Canadians under the Access to Information Act.

I remind the House of the de Havilland share sale order and the remission order involving Stelco and the others. There are members from both sides of the House who are working on this. We are not giving up and we will do everything we can to force the government to account. When I address the issue in this bill about post-sale accountability I am trying to tell this House that I am angry because the government is not delivering. It is posturing. Cover up is the wrong term to use. There is non-disclosure. There is secrecy and the taxpayer is being shafted in the process because the taxpayer cannot call the government to account. The taxpayer does not know what is happening. These events could be happening in the classic back room. They are certainly happening behind closed cabinet doors.

I had to take note in this House earlier today when the government House leader skated right over the whole concept of Question Period as a vehicle or a mechanism for calling the government to account. It is a vehicle that has been used well by the opposition and a vehicle that can be used by its own members on the backbench. He forgot about that. That is a vehicle for calling the government and the ministers who sometimes have to sit in the House for 45 minutes and not be asked a question. But that process of bringing the Governor in Council, the cabinet, into the House and placing it there for questions from members who represent all Canadians is the process of accountability. It is all we have in this House during the day's proceedings.

I want to signal to the government that subclause 16(1) is a travesty. It is a vehicle that will not serve Parliament and the parliamentary function and it will not serve Canadians. We will not support it and I will do everything that I can as a member to make sure it is not passed.

Mr. Dennis Mills (Broadview—Greenwood): I want to ask my hon. colleague a question. It relates back to the member for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca who asked before Question Period what the relationship is between the sale of the domed stadium by the provincial NDP