

Government Information

respect of parliament and of observers of parliament for their knowledge of the rules and procedures here. I participate as a junior member of parliament who has been surprised in my short time in this House at how often I am told that public business has to be kept from me, that I cannot be told about this or that, that I cannot be trusted with certain information. I am told this often, as we all are as newcomers to this House. As members of the House of Commons of Canada we are in the category of restricted people who cannot be trusted with information. Surely that is a situation which should not be allowed to continue.

The problem with respect to the insistence on secrecy does not apply simply to the failure of the government to produce papers. I spoke recently to an assistant deputy minister, someone who, incidentally, is earning more than any of us here, and he told me that he didn't wish to be quoted but that if he followed the habit around here he would have to stamp "secret" on the toilet paper because that particular classification was so much in use.

Mr. Beatty: Probably because it was bought from a Liberal without tender.

Mr. Clark (Rocky Mountain): There are a number of other instances of secrecy here. I want to deal quickly with some of them. The point was made earlier about consultants' reports. We now contract out a great deal of the responsibility for decision-making to consultants. Nearly a billion dollars is being spent on consultants' fees. Yet very many of the reports which are received, reports which should be public information, are hidden from us. They are hidden from members in this House. We are not to be trusted. We are not to be trusted with these reports which are provided by consultants, at an annual fee of a billion dollars, to advise the government. That is one instance.

I want to go back to something my hon. friend from Peace River mentioned when he talked about the report which inspired the development of Information Canada. There was heavy emphasis in that report on a sort of ombudsman role, a role which would not simply involve a big machine spewing out propaganda year after year from Ottawa to the country, but which would somehow go out and try to gather opinions from the country and feed them back to Ottawa.

The report envisaged that someone would go out and try to find grievances and make sure they were corrected. But that part of the report was ignored. The part which was acted upon was the part dealing with propaganda. So we have a very serious situation now in which Information Canada only sends out the approved version of information which, in many cases, and I say this with regret, cannot be trusted to reflect the facts.

As well, Information Canada has led to an immense duplication of information facilities. For every member of the press gallery there are ten or 15 information officers dumping stuff on their desks, sending out the approved versions, elbowing up to them at the bar of the Press Club to make sure that the approved version is communicated to the country. That is a very sophisticated and large propaganda machine, something which should be of concern to everyone in this House who is worried about the

[Mr. Clark (Rocky Mountain).]

right of Canadians to know what is going on in the country.

Another developing practice has been that of making important announcements outside the House instead of inside the Commons. The Minister of Finance (Mr. Turner) today, for example, announced his new economic policy, which I remind hon. members on the other side is an incomes policy. He did not make his announcement here in the House but outside the House.

Again, we have witnessed the frequent practice of answers to serious questions being given flippantly in the House so that another means of access to information is cut down. We even get from our distinguished and well-respected Secretary of State for External Affairs (Mr. MacEachen), now that there is a fixed time limit to questions in the period, answers given by him to every question very, very, slowly so as to consume as much time as he possibly can. This cuts into our capacity to elicit information through the question period.

During the last few weeks a very surprising experience relating to questions of national security happened to be discovered by chance. We were putting questions to an unprepared minister in a standing committee and it came to light that it was the practice to fudge the estimates, not to be honest with the House of Commons and the people of Canada in the estimates which were brought forward because the government hides votes for security services in a range of departments.

When that matter was raised in the House the minister, the Minister of State for Science and Technology (Mr. Drury), announced the government's preparedness to set up some kind of arrangement by which members could be briefed on questions of security. Yesterday I sought leave to introduce a motion to urge the House leaders to go ahead with that arrangement. But it was voted down by members of the other side. They did that at the beginning of the question period and then, a few minutes later, talking out of the other side of their mouths, they refused to answer questions on security matters on the grounds that such things should not be discussed in the House. They said under the standing order they should not be discussed anywhere; they said in the question period that they should not be discussed in the House of Commons. It is unfortunately the position of the Government of Canada that important questions relating to security as well as to other matters should not be discussed anywhere. Mr. Speaker, that is not a position which anyone interested in a democracy can accept without a great deal of fear.

A degree of confidentiality has, of course, to apply, perhaps in all matters and certainly in security matters. But that is a quite different principle from the principle which is enunciated and illustrated by the government, which says you cannot trust parliament and you cannot trust the people with anything except the approved versions sent out under the imprimatur of Information Canada.

I recall in 1968, Mr. Speaker, in the election campaign of the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau), the heavy emphasis that was placed upon the phrase "participatory democracy". There was a heavy emphasis placed on getting people involved. Well, we all know that the basic essential element to participation is information. You cannot have