

Regulations and Other Statutory Instruments

his counsel to say that what appears in the green paper must be foisted on the royal commission, and the royal commission has no alternative but to accept it. I have not had a chance to read the transcript so I do not know what Mr. Justice McDonald, the chairman, will do about it. However, I think he will be glad to hear from members of this House as to their views respecting the kind of conduct on the part of the Solicitor General concerning his view as to how limited the evidence ought to be that is presented to the royal commission. That is what freedom of information and disclosure is all about.

A suggestion has been made in the media, here and elsewhere, that despite protestations to the contrary members of the government, during the pertinent times of 1971, 1972 and later, were aware of and might even have been privy to some of the actions engaged in by the security forces. That is a moot point on which this commission has to hear evidence and come to a decision.

● (1602)

In addition to the royal commission, surely this House and members of the public are entitled to hear the evidence, unless that evidence goes right to the root of national defence or criminal investigation. Surely this House and the members of the public are entitled to know what evidence will be given by cabinet ministers or those close to them, so that they can form their own opinion as to whether or not members of this government were aware in 1971, 1972 or 1973 of what was going on. I say that because I, in company with a great many other thousands of Canadians, believe that what was done was done with a certain knowledge of government ministers at the time.

We are entitled to hear that evidence and come to a conclusion. If we are wrong, if the evidence is to the contrary, I will accept it and that will be the end of it. However, so long as that evidence is going to be given in camera, guarded from public view, suspicion will continue to lurk in the minds of tens of thousands of people that the government has been engaged in a gigantic game of cover-up. With the state of the political situation in this country at the present time, that would be a disaster.

We read of proposition 13 and of governments being defeated. There is no doubt in the minds of those of us who travel around Canada and in other democratic countries that governments of today have engaged in such conduct over the last few years that they have thoroughly lost the confidence of the public they represent.

Even though I am in complete disagreement with my hon. friends opposite, I consider this to be a very dangerous situation. We cannot govern unless there is a measure of co-operation and confidence between the government and the governed. Credibility is essential. It is a condition precedent to good government. When that credibility is destroyed, it is a precious asset which cannot be easily regained.

The attempt by the Solicitor General in this particular matter to engage in what can only be construed as being further cover-up is something which must be mentioned in this

[Mr. Baldwin.]

House. I hope that other members of this House will pay attention to it before this matter is disposed of.

The other aspect which invites some attention in connection with this issue was the attempt by the Unemployment Insurance Commission recently to give instruction to its regional offices that statistical information which they were able to gather and amass on the question of unemployment in their regions must not be made public. The reason assigned was that this would be embarrassing to the minister. Ministers who are privy to this kind of instruction being given need to be embarrassed. They need to be embarrassed very much.

I now want to quote from a transcript of a letter from the deputy minister to the executive directors. Fortunately, I am protected by my privileges in this House and not subject to the Official Secrets Act which otherwise I might well be. As Your Honour and members of the House know, the Official Secrets Act is such a ridiculous, obscene monster that if I were to take this document and read it outside, I would be subject to the provisions of the Official Secrets Act. I consider I still have some more useful functions before I find a safe sojourn in a sunlit, southern exposed cell. The letter dated May 15, 1978, reads in part:

There certainly would be no objection to the development of local area estimates of numbers of unemployed or employed, particularly by occupation or industry. These I agree are necessary to support regional planning. However, it is important that the estimates of unemployment number should be kept confidential and their circulation limited in the manner described in the policy. . . . As you know, these estimates have been a source of some embarrassment for the minister because of their potential conflict with the labour surplus rates in the Canada Works program. Since it is not clear to me why you need them, nor have any reasons per se been given for their development, I would suggest that we avoid producing them.

That is the stuff upon which members of parliament, the public, and the media are entitled to assess and evaluate the conduct and manner in which government carries on its operations. If there is, as there obviously was in this case, a clear conflict between the probably more favourable figures conceived after a very brief period of gestation and produced by the minister here and the figures gathered by the regional directors, the public is entitled to know.

Unemployment is too serious to be made the subject of a directive of that kind. I call that to the attention of members in the hope that when I come to deal very briefly with the contents of the report, there will be approval. I hope members opposite will approve.

As they may be aware, the national Liberal party, gathered together in session a year and a half ago, moved a motion seeking a freedom of information act with a review process to the courts and with reasonable exemptions. They followed the path which had been hewed by this party and had been one of our platforms for a number of years. I welcomed that in the national Liberal party.

Hon. members sitting here today who may be called upon to vote will have to make a very serious assessment. Are they going to approve a recommendation from an all-party committee from both Houses which recommends very strongly certain reasonable provisions to be contained in a bill and which follow