

*Government Orders*

In my view of the world, disclosure does not equate with information. People can disclose, for example, how to build a nuclear weapon. That does not mean that I can build it. The information is not something that I can digest or transpose into concrete acts.

What we are dealing with in my view is a system that purports to be accountable, that legislatively is supposed to be accountable, but that in fact spends a great deal of its time making decisions that no one can really track down in terms of being able to tag accountability on to an individual.

We all know that our tradition in this place rests on ministerial accountability. If anybody believes that that still holds true today except in the most blatant of cases where ministers are completely out of line, they are being very naive.

The most experienced people in government now make sure that every avenue is covered so that no matter what happens no one individually is accountable.

If we are to look at legislation like this, which is going to put people in a position where they can make decisions at local and regional levels in a very different way from what is being done now, are we going to make the system more useful to Canadians, or are we just going to create a system where a lot more people have to make sure they can cover their tracks?

I hope that accountability of people in the Public Service and transparency in making sure that people understand what is being done will be key points that will be reviewed when this legislation is referred to a special committee.

The stakes are very high. This country has a lot of good men and women in the Public Service. We need to make sure that we reassure them as to exactly what the rules are. What are they going to be expected to do? Is it going to be a pass the buck system? Is it going to be a cover every avenue system? Is it going to be a system where people are given opportunities to make decisions?

We stand behind them when they make the decisions because they know the parameters under which they are functioning when those decisions are made.

The initiative is a laudable one, to move our Public Service into the 21st century. Certainly Canadians want people to be able to make decisions. We have too much government, layer over layer of government from the municipal level to the provincial level to the federal

level. We have all kinds of special agencies, review boards and all the rest of it.

Surely the objective is not to make life more complicated for the public servant or for the public. I do not think the government has gone far enough in making sure it has consulted widely enough, that there has been sufficient opportunity for discussion, debate and input.

That is why I recommend strongly to the government that it accept our recommendation that this bill not be considered at this time, that it be referred to a special committee, and that that committee make every effort to function in a way that will restore confidence in the Public Service on the part of the Canadian public. At a time when morale is suffering in the Public Service, the men and women in our Public Service should be provided with the confidence required to do their jobs properly. They should know what is expected of them and how the system is going to work. They should have had a say in how it is going to evolve and feel relatively comfortable with what is finally proposed.

In closing, may I say that most Canadians have the highest respect for the people who work in our Public Service. In northern New Brunswick we have a government office in Bathurst, in my constituency, that deals with matters across the country. It was decentralized in the 1970s. It has hundreds of public servants who do magnificent work. I know that because I deal with them directly. Northern New Brunswick suffers from very high unemployment. The people in the Canada Employment and Immigration complex in Bathurst exemplify in my view so much of what is good in the Canadian Public Service.

• (1110)

Most of the employees are bilingual. My constituency is bilingual. They function internally in both official languages of Canada. They provide services in both official languages of Canada. They provide services in an area where the client base is oftentimes frustrated and unhappy with its lot, and rightfully so.

I want to emphasize that no one is seeking to delay because we are not sure how we want to deal with the bill. What we are saying is that it is absolutely essential that public servants have their say about working conditions, about responsibility, and about accountability. They should have their say, as I mentioned, in the face of technological advances that are being made month by month, technological advances that will change the way they work, will often change where they work, will