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Freedom of Information

The Ontario Commission on Freedom of Information and Individual Privacy in its report of 5 August 1980 stated:

"Of the many countries in the Western world where freedom of information and privacy protection statutes already exist, the best known are Sweden (where the tradition is some 200 years old) and the United States...Historically, democratic governments modelled on the English tradition (Westminster-style governments) have been slow to adopt freedom of information and privacy legislation...The English tradition of government secrecy, based on public trust and confidence, has been seriously eroded by the many betrayals of confidence that have recently come to light...Of equal, if less dramatic importance has been the recent use by governments of computers as storehouses of information, both general and personal, which seem to be highly vulnerable to access by unauthorized persons.

"The result is that people now want to see for themselves what governments are up to, and they want to be sure, as well, that the private information governments hold is not only accurate, but properly protected from prying eyes...

"The central and animating principle of a freedom of information law should be that the individual is entitled, as of right, to obtain access to government information."

Freedom of information and privacy legislation now exists in the Federal Government and in the provinces of Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. To date, there has been no indication from the Government of Alberta that similar legislation is planned in this province, and there has been substantial evidence that the federal legislation is not allowing for the access to information it was intended to. This edition of FIRST READING takes a brief look at freedom of information in Canada.

If knowledge is power, then access to the information from which knowledge is gained, is the key to power. This perhaps explains why totalitarian governments invariably restrict access to information within their control and discourage the search for and dissemination of information by a free press.

Tradition vs. the New Wave

In our own society access to information in the hands of the government has traditionally been a privilege, not a right. Except where access to government documents could be compelled because of their direct relevance in a legal action, access to information has depended, and in several provinces including Alberta still does depend, upon the consent of the responsible government or agency. In most cases that consent has been forthcoming, either upon request or, in the case of sensitive government documents, including Cabinet documents, usually after a period of thirty years.

But, for all its apparent liberality, the traditional means of granting the public access to information is seriously flawed. There is often no way someone outside the government can learn of the existence of the information require. Even where the information is known to exist, there is no obligation on the part of the government or its agencies to make it available. Access can be denied unless the information, and the party requesting it, are deemed proper. Finally, even where information is made available, there is no mechanism for compelling the correction of errors in that information.

These shortcomings, together with the postwar explosion in the size and duties of governments and of the information they collect, and the evolution of technologies that allow the collection of vast amounts of information about individuals, have created a demand for laws codifying the right of access to information. Such laws are intended to

set out not only the obligation governments and their agencies produce information, but also to set reasonable limits upon that production to safeguard national security and privacy of individuals. To date, the federal government and several provinces have passed access to information laws. Alberta has not. What follows is a critical review of the federal Information and Privacy Acts, Acts which would, no doubt, provide the precedent for any similar legislation in Alberta.

The Federal Legislation

At first blush the federal Access to Information and Privacy Acts (S.C. 1980-81-82, c. 111, Schedules I and II), seem to solve the problems set out above. They confirm the right of the public and of the individual to access information in government files. They require government departments and agencies publish bulletins describing their records, and the limitation period for witholding information has been shortened to 20 The Privacy Act also gives individuals access not only to their files, but the right to correct errors in those files and have notices of the corrections sent to anyone who has been given Both Acts also access to their files. provide for a commissioner to investigate refusals of access and some other complaints.

Both Acts imply a simple straightforward process. A party seeking information should be able to obtain it by making a written request describing the desired record in "sufficient detail to enable the experienced employee with a reasonable effort to identify the record," and paying the appropriate fee. The institution of which the request is made then has 30 days in which to supply it or to notify the Information or Privacy Commissioner why compliance with the request has been delayed or refused. The 30 day limit is extended where the request requires the compliance of more than one government institution or where the information must be assembled from several sources.

The Legislations' Workings

Neither Act, however, works as simply as it first appears. While both confirm the principles behind all good "freedom of information" legislation - that necessary exceptions to the right of access should be limited and specific and that denial of access should be reviewed independently of the government - they then go on to restrict the definition of producible information and to set out broad exemptions and a review process that is both cumbersome and limited in scope.

To be producible, the information must be a record within the "control" of the government institution. Therefore. information that is collected by a consultant or an extra-government body may be denied on the grounds that it is not within the control of the government institution. Further, while the definition of record is broad and includes "machine readable" or computerized records, it does not include records in libraries or archives. To keep a document secret it is only necessary that it be transferred to the Public Archives before the 20 year limitation in the Access to Information Act, with instructions to Archives officials not to release the information without the approval of a designated government official.

The Acts also contain two types of exceptions to the right of access: exceptions based on the type of government institution, and exceptions based on the type of information. The Acts list the institutions which must comply, but the list does not include either Crown Corporations or the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and leaves questionable whether committees appointed by ministers of government departments would be bound.

Information can also be refused where it falls into any one of eleven classes of information. Some are understandable and expected, such as where disclosure would imperil national security or police investigations or would reveal a trade secret. Less understandable is the absolute exception for Cabinet

confidences. Any documentation which it is alleged has been considered by Cabinet can be withheld. There is no "harms test" provided in this section. No matter how trivial, documents considered by Cabinet are not producible for 20 years. Indeed, the absence of a "harms test" for Cabinet documents places them in a higher category than documents pertaining to national security, which may be reviewed by the Information or Privacy Commissioner, or by the Federal Court, to determine whether the harm caused by disclosure would be trivial in comparison with the potential benefits.

The interaction of the Access to Information Act and the Privacy Act also limits access to information. Many documents contain references to indivi-Under the Privacy Act those documents, or at least the portions referring to individuals, cannot be released without the consent of the individual, if he or she can be found, unless public interest in disclosure outweighs any resulting invasion of privacy or unless disclosure would clearly benefit the individual to whom the information relates. However, should the government decide to disclose information referring to individuals, it has no obligation to advise them that it has done so or to provide a copy of the disclosed information to the affected individuals. While the individuals, if they find out, can complain to the Privacy Commissioner about the invasion of privacy, there is no right to a judicial review since judicial review is only available for contesting a denial of access information.

A Help or a Hindrance?

In the end, the question must be asked: Do the Access to Information and Privacy Acts help or hinder the flow of information? To answer I draw on my own experiences. Prior to the enactment of the above Acts I wrote a book, Politics of Racism, on the treatment of Japanese Canadians during the Second World War. My research included reviewing, among others, Cabinet documents, police reports and the records of property owned by individual Japanese Canadians. The first two categories were readily made available

to me under the then 30 year rule, notwithstanding that they both contained information with respect to individuals. By contrast, I was denied access to the financial records for two years, not because they pertained to individuals, but because even though over thirty years had passed, the bureaucrat who controlled them felt that someone with a Japanese Canadian surname was not a proper person to have access. In the end it took political pressure to get the financial records transferred to the Public Archives before I could use them.

Today, I am informed by archivists at the Public Archives of Canada, I would be denied access to many of the documents I used, particularly the police documents, primarily because of the Privacy Act but also because of their national security classification. The latter denial could probably be overcome, if I could afford the appeal process, since nothing I saw that was classified as secret could imperil the security of Canada, then or now.

Initially, I would also be denied access to the financial documents. The best proof of that is the experience of Price Waterhouse in the preparation of its recently released report, from the same financial information I used, on the losses suffered by Japanese Canadians. Access to that information was denied

for six months until a ruling was obtained that the public interest in disclosing the losses suffered by Japanese Canadians as a group outweighed the invasion of privacy of the individual property owners, most of whom were dead. It is to be noted, however, that this delay of six months is considerably less than the delay I faced at the hands of intrasigent bureaucrats.

From the above I draw conclusions. The presence of legislation has made the federal government more sensitive to making information available. Moreover, sincere efforts appear to be being made to protect the privacy of individuals. On the other hand, both Acts are seriously flawed and appear to be intended primarily to keep secret the information Cabinet uses. The existence of legislation is an improvement but, like most first efforts, needs revision and should not be copied holis bolis by Alberta when and if this province proceeds to enact freedom of information and privacy legislation.

M. Ann Sunahara is an Edmonton lawyer interested in social issues. She is the author of the Politics of Racism, in which she used government records to document the treatment of Japanese Canadians during the Second World War.

Forum on Assaulted Women _

The Edmonton area co-ordinators of the Alberta Association of Social Workers (A.A.S.W.) invite you to attend a forum on the topic Assaulted Women: Attitudes, Values and Beliefs on June 4, 1986 at 8:00 p.m. in:

The Board Room Edmonton Social Planning Council 4th Floor, 10010 - 105 Street Panelists for the forum will be:

- Lauri Baldwin, City of Edmonton Social Services
- Mike Crawford, F.A.C.S.
- Terry Peacock, Strathcona F.C.S.S.
- Ruth Pinkney, W.I.N. House

A fee of \$1 will be charged for A.A.S.W. members, \$3 for non-members. For further information, please call Sally Devereux at 471-2262 ext. 2374.

PUBLICATION SERVICE

Once again, we bring to you the bi-annual selection of available publications from the Council's Publication Distribution Service. We hope that you will be interested by the Council's own publications as well as those published by the Canadian Council on Social Development and the National Council on Welfare.

Appearing on the four pages of this insert are the available publications and their prices. Please be sure to enclose payment with your order. When ordering multiple copies of one publication, do not enclose payment - you will be invoiced. You may waive postage and handling charges by purchasing publications at the Council office.

Members of the council will receive substantial discounts on publication prices, as indicated on the order form.

From the Edmonton Social Planning Council

Research Libraries Social Issues A guide to assist human service agencies,

government departments, researchers and students in using the many libraries in Edmonton which contain material relating to social welfare, social policy, social work and social services. (1985)

\$8.00 \$2 postage & handling

\$6.0Ò

- The Board/Staff Workbook Explains the principles of effective organizational structure. The workbook offers selfdiscovery exercises suitable for organization use. (no date)
- \$2 postage & handling The Nuts and Bolts of Community Based **Economic Development**

Represents selected theme papers from a 1982 conference held in Edmonton. The papers are of special interest to readers concerned with community initiative and Community Development Corporations. (1982) Free \$2 postage & handling

Ethical Investments: More Value for Your Money

This report analyzes the concept of investment in companies which feature products and business practices consistent with the investor's personal values and beliefs. Historical developments are highlighted in the report as is a summary of several successful U.S. ethical investment funds. (1986) \$2.00 \$2 postage & handling

Future Directions for Pensions: An address by Crawford E. Laing. The text of a speech given April 16, 1986 which reviews developments in the pension

reform process since 1979. Economic and political questions are raised about both public and private pension schemes. The author concludes with his speculation regarding future trends and innovations.

\$2.00 \$2 postage & handling

- Surviving on Welfare A No Frills Flight A description of the practical consequences of living on welfare monies through the eyes and mouths of social allowance recipients. The report examines recipients' financial limitations, experiences with welfare officials, and treatment by the community. Nine recommendations directed at improving the social allowance system are tendered in the report's conclusion. (1986) \$2.00 \$2 postage & handling
- Unemployment: Reaping the Costs Using standard economic concepts, this report estimates that unemployment cost Albertans \$14 billion in 1983 and 1984 alone. If the social costs of unemployment were factored in, the total would be higher. An incomplete assessment of unemployment costs by government could be seen to result in misdirected and ineffective economic policies. (1986) \$1.00 \$2 postage & handling
- Counting the Costs*: A Literature Review of the Social and Psychological Costs of Unemployment. This report documents the impact of unemployment on the family, on physical and mental health, and on the incidence of suicide and crime. (1985) \$10.00 \$2 postage & handling

* This report is available only to Edmonton Social Planning Council members.

From the National Council of Welfare

- Poor People's Groups (February 1973)
 The report of a seminar on self-help problem solving by low-income communities, examining some of the problems faced by low-income organizations and how these have been dealt with by various groups.

 Free. \$2 postage & handling
- Prices and the Poor (April 1974)
 A report on the low-income consumer in the Canadian market place, and how the poor are obliged to pay more and get less for their money than other Canadians.

 Free. \$2 postage & handling
- Organizing for Social Action (April 1975)
 A description of three successful organizing experiences and analysis by those who participated in them of why they were successful.

 Free \$2 postage & handling
- Bearing the Burden/Sharing the Benefits (March 1978)
 A study of tayation and income redistribution.

A study of taxation and income redistribution which describes how parts of Canada's existing tax system place their heaviest burden on the poor and how the tax system can be changed to benefit the poor.

Free. \$2 postage & handling

 The Refundable Child Tax Credit: What it is ... How it Works (December 1978)

A background paper describing the newest part of Canada's income support system for families with children and how it assists low and middle-income families.

Free. \$2 postage & handling

 Bookkeeping Handbook for Low-Income Citizen Groups (October 1973)

A guide for use by both new and advanced citizen groups, this report describes a bookkeeping system which can be used by groups and illustrates the system by tracing the bookkeeping history of a sample group.

Free. \$2 postage & handling

- Better Pensions for Homemakers (May 1984)
 A critique of the homemaker pension proposal
 of the Parliamentary Task Force on Pension
 Reform. The report explains the homemaker
 pension proposal and summarizes the arguments of its supporters.

 Free. \$2 postage & handling
- Family Allowances for All? (March 1983)
 An analysis of the costs and distributional effects of the family allowance, child tax credit and children's tax exemption. An account of the arguments for and against universal family allowances, and a proposal to reform federal child benefits.

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A Pension Primer (April 1984)

A description and critique of Canada's complex retirement income system. The study is geared to the lay reader with no specialized knowledge of the pension system.

Free. \$2 postage & handling

• A Poverty Profile (Annual)

Tables and explanatory text on the most recent statistics on poverty, average income and income distribution in Canada. The report analyzes both recent and long-term trends, and highlights groups with an above-average risk of poverty.

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Poor Kids (March 1975)

A report on the more than one million Canadian children living in poverty and the consequences for their health, education and life prospects.

Free. \$2 postage & handling

One in a World of Two's (April 1976)

A report on one-parent families in Canada and the economic and social problems they face in the labor market, child care services, welfare, housing and social services.

Free. \$2 postage & handling

• Financing the Canada Pension Plan (December 1982)

This report explains how the Canada Pension Plan is financed and the use of surplus funds to provide loans to the provinces. It examines future demands on the CPP and proposes a gradual increase in contribution rates and a move to pay-go financing.

Free. \$2 postage & handling

Women and Poverty (October 1979)
 This report describes poor women and explains why the majority of Canadian women can expect to become poor at some point in their lives.

Free. \$2 postage & handling

 Medicare: the public good and private practice (May 1982)

An account of the purposes, achievements and development of national health insurance, the health gap facing low-income Canadians, and the threat to medicare posed by user charges and health premiums.

Free. \$2 postage & handling

Sixty-Five and Older (February 1984)
 A comprehensive study of the economic situation of elderly Canadians. The report emphasizes the inferior economic status of elderly women, particularly the large and growing group living alone.

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Pension Reform (April 1984)

A review of the three major approaches to pension reform — regulatory reform of private pension plans, mandatory private plans, and expansion of the Canada and Quebec Pension Plans.

Free. \$2 postage & handling

1985 Poverty Lines

An explanation of Statistics Canada's lowincome lines, with National Council of Welfare estimates for 1985 and actual lines for 1980 through 1984.

Free. \$1 postage & handling

From the Canadian Council on Social Development



Canadian Fact Book on Poverty 1983
 An updated and revised version of the 1975 and 1979 Fact Books. As well as presenting the latest figures on low income Canadians it includes a graphic presentation of income distribution by family size. 1983. 120 pp.

 \$7.95
 \$2 postage & handling

Helping You Helps Me
 A practical guide to starting and maintaining a self-help group. Leadership, membership, recruitment, fund-raising, problem-solving and decision-making are among the more than twenty topics covered. 1983. 80 pp.

 Free \$2 postage & handling

 Proceedings of the 2nd Canadian Conference on Day Care

The proceedings provide a 1982 bench mark

The proceedings provide a 1982 bench mark for the continuing development of high quality day care in Canada. 1983. \$9.95 \$2 postage & handling

Native Children and the Child Welfare System
 An in-depth study on the treatment of Native
 children within the Canadian welfare system
 with a detailed description of past practices
 and current provincial and territorial policies.
 1983. 196 pp.
 \$9.95 \$2 postage & handling

Women and Pensions

Documents the economic position of the older woman and examines work-related issues that have an effect on women's pensions. Examines alternatives and makes recommendations for change. 1978. 250 pp. \$4.50 \$2 postage & handling

Access and the Policy-Making Process
 Explores the traditional theories of participatory and representative democracy in relation to the Canadian political system. The report provides a careful review of the key federal decision-making structures. 1978. 62 pp.

 \$4.00
 \$2 postage and handling

Part-Time Work in Canada
 A submission to the Advisory Council, Employment and Immigration Canada. 1980. 44 pp.
 Harry MacKay.
 \$4.00
 \$2 postage & handling

 Women and Housing: Changing Needs and the Failure of Policy

This report presents an analysis of consumer need drawn from a statistical profile of Canadian women constructed from the most recent national data sources available and placed in a social context. February 1984.

\$7.95 \$2 postage & handling

• Community Multi-Service Centres
Examines community resource boards in B.C., local community service centres in Quebec, regional health centres in Manitoba and other Canadian systems for the delivery of health and social services at the local level. 1976.

140 pp.
\$5.50 \$2 postage & handling

• Family Law in Canada: New Directions
Sexual equality became a constitutionally
guaranteed right for Canadian women this
year. This volume examines family law from a
feminist perspective. It addresses such issues
as joint custody, legal treatment of common
law spouses, and the implications of invitro fertilization. It also discusses the complicated
structure of family law in Canada, defining the
area under federal and provincial control and
the many "grey areas" between the two. Published by The Canadian Advisory Council on
the Status of Women. 1985.
\$4.95 \$2 postage & handling

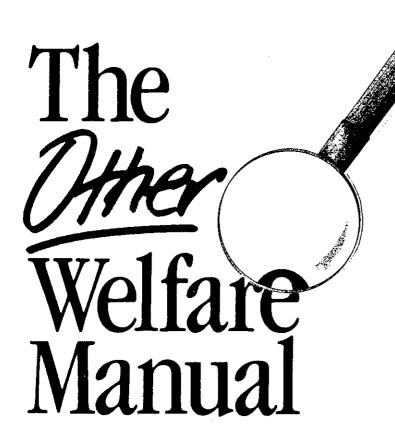
• Deinstitutionalization: Costs and Effects
The case for the cost-effectiveness of deinstitutionalization is most difficult to consider when community living is promoted as the only alternative. But in April 1984 researchers and advocates of deinstitutionalization met at an international symposium to try. Consumers and academics presented papers on deinstitutionalization, which affects the lives of persons who are physically, mentally or psychiatrically disabled. The revised and edited papers cover a spectrum of viewpoints on this complex subject. 1985.

\$15.00 \$2 postage & handling

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prepared by.

Edmonton Social Planning Council

April 1986

The Other Welfare Manual

A much-publicized "how-to" manual for applicants and recipients of social assistance in Alberta. The Handbook is designed to encourage its readers to advocate effectively on their own behalf for maximum benefits. Major topic areas cover eligibility criteria, entitlements, appeal procedures and survival techniques.

As a means of identifying key content areas, 300 questionnaires were completed by recipients of social assistance. Additionally, staff from 50 human service agencies were interviewed at length. Similar handbooks developed in other provinces and countries, were used for reference. \$4.00 \$2 postage & handling Free for welfare recipients

Agencies which are interested in distributing copies of this manual free of charge to welfare recipients are encouraged to contact the Council. An agency can request as many as 25 copies at one time. It is also recommended that these agencies purchase desk copies for their staff at the regular price.

An F. O. I. Review

NOVA SCOTIA - The first Commonwealth jurisdiction to provide a legal right to government-held information, its Freedom of Information Act was enacted on 1 November 1977. The Act is limited in its effect in that it requires disclosure only of internal agency law and of personal information about an applicant held in government records. Access to information is limited by a number of prohibitions, and appeals from an adverse decision must be made to the provincial legislature. There is no provision for an appeal to the courts.

NEW BRUNSWICK - Access to government documents is provided by the Right to Information Act, proclaimed in force on 1 January 1980. The statute is similar to the United States' Freedom of Information Act, conferring a general public right to information subject to certain specified exemptions. Appeals from a refusal to grant access to requested information may be referred to the Ombudsman or to a judge of the Supreme Court. The Court has the power to order the disclosure of wrongfully withheld information.

THE UNITED STATES - The Freedom of Information Act became operational in July 1977 and underwent major amendment in 1974 and minor change in 1976. The Act adopts as its major principle the proposition that members of the public are entitled to see and make copies of government records unless exempted under one of nine specific exemptions. Most of the exemptions have been subject to extensive judicial interpretation, with some having been effectively redefined by the case law. The narrowness of the exemptions and the availability of full review by the courts are the two principal features of the legislation.

SWEDEN - Ever since 1766 (except for the years 1772-1774 and 1792-1810) Sweden has maintained, as a fundamental principle of law, that official documents, with as few exceptions as possible, shall be open to the public. This principle is now laid down in the 1949 Freedom of the Press Act (one of Sweden's constitutional documents), as amended in 1976. The access to information rules provide every citizen or alien with the right to see official documents. This right can only be restricted through a special Act of Parliament.

DENMARK - The first access to information law was passed in 1964. It was amended in 1970 and a new Act, the Access of the Public to Documents in Administrative Files (the Open Files Act), was passed by Parliament. The exemptions from access, and the lengths to which administrative authorities are legally bound to open their files, are clearly stipulated in the law. Appeals are allowed to the administrative authority, but there is no specific allowance for judicial review. The majority of appeals are lodged with the Ombudsman.

FRANCE - The Law on the Freedom of Access to Administrative Documents, guarantees the right to information concerning administrative non-nominative (not naming an individual personally) documents. A Commission and the Minister are responsible for determining which documents in a particular department are to be exempt from public access. Appeals, via the Commission and the judicial system, are provided for.

NORWAY - Since its enactment in 1970, the Public Access Act has provided the public with the right of access to public documents. Under the legislation all documents are considered to be public unless specifically exempted. Three alternative appeal procedures are available, including appeal to the courts on the legality of a decision taken to not release information.

FINLAND - The 1951 Publicity of Documents Act follows the Swedish tradition however, unlike the Swedish right, it is not a part of the constitution. The general right of access to administrative documents is balanced by exemptions which can include whole classes of documents. Only Finnish citizens maintain a right of access, with the right of appeal to the Supreme Administrative Court.

THE NETHERLANDS - The Access to Official Information law was enacted in November 1978. It takes a different approach from the Scandinavian laws in that it allows for the release of official information, rather than documents, in administrative cases. The exemptions to access are quite broad and appeals from decisions are sent to the Council of State (composed of former members of Parliament and the executive and distinguished members of society).

This information was adapted from "Freedom of Information and Individual Privacy: An International Symposium." The Law Society of Upper Canada, 1980.

Accessing Information on Non-Profits

Henry Dembicki

society is a convenient effective means of establishing a service group as evidenced by Alberta's 11 800 incorporated societies. In Alberta, as few as five people may organize and incorporate a society. By incorporating under the Societies Act, members gain a number of benefits. A member of a society cannot be held responsible for a debt incurred by the society. incorporated society can hold title to property and enter into contracts in its own name. A society is eligible to apply for government grants any may be eligible for tax benefits as a registered charity. A group of parents with physically disabled children could form a group to provide a service, for example. By incorporating as a society they could own a building or van, be eligible for government grants, and be eligible to register as a charity.

It can also be difficult for nonmembers of a society to gather information about the operations of any society.

Societies Can Have Problems

An incorporated society is an uncomplicated and efficient organization for providing services such as those required by the disabled, and the handicapped. These strengths are also weaknesses, however, in that such an organization, while easily set up can just as easily be dominated by a strong individual or a small clique whose interests are not compatible with the rest of the group members.

Groups are constantly faced with problems. They may be of a relatively minor nature, such as a talkative member who takes over a meeting, or a major concern such as deciding in the light of inadequate revenues, what services will be provided to whom. The latter type of problem is a common one for groups which provide services for the disabled and the handicapped. Who is going to get a particular service when there is a one

year waiting list? What services should the group provide? Should the group be more aggressive in lobbying the government for more funding so that more clients can be served? Where decision-making is dominated by a small group, those adversely affected by any decision on such matters might feel the decision is unjust.

In some cases, these fears are well founded. Societies have a less formal structure than a limited company. Their small size and low profile make it possible for a dominant person to control the organization. What can someone do if he suspects that a society is not operating in the best interests of its members?

Sources of Society Information

Any society incorporated in Alberta must operate in accordance with the provisions set out in the Societies Act. It is the responsibility of the society to file an annual return every year. The return gives basic information on the society including a financial statement and an attachment listing directors and/or officers. This information is put on file at the Corporate Registry, Alberta Consumer and Corporate Affairs. For a small fee, a citizen can see a microfilm copy of the information.

In most cases, this information will be of little use to someone who wants to obtain information of the workings of a society. Financial statements can be prepared by two officers of the organization. These statements do not have to be audited by a chartered accountant. The names of officers and their addresses may be incomplete or inaccurate. A group may be as much as two years behind in filing annual returns.

If the society is also a registered charity, it is required under the federal Income Tax Act to file an annual return every year with Revenue Canada. The society must fill out a Public Information Return (Form T3010) with applicable

schedules. However, one is unlikely to glean much specific information from T3010. Form While the attached schedules contain more useful information related to the society's activities, this information is not for public viewing. One could apply to see these forms under the federal Access to Act, but there is no Information guarantee that such a request will be successful. In any event, by the time the information is retrieved it could be two or more years old.

In short, provincial and federal legislation does offer access to the information that they collect from registered societies. Since the legislation, both provincial and federal, does not provide for the supervision of the conduct of societies nor for the resolution of internal disputes this information is not of much help to the concerned public. Revenue Canada is concerned, for example, with how much money was spent on a particular service, not about the process that went into making the spending decision. Alberta Consumer and Corporate Affairs maintains records on incorporated societies but explicitly states in its information packets that "Societies must be prepared to resolve their own internal disputes."

If people are to maintain faith in the ability of non-profit societies to provide services to the handicapped and disabled, for example, the Alberta government will have to take a more active role in supervising the conduct of societies. After all, the government allows groups to incorporate themselves, why shouldn't it supervise a society's activities, particularly when a society receives government grants?

A first step should be to enforce the filing of annual returns so that they are fully completed and submitted on time.

Second, a mediation procedure should be established to help society members to resolve internal disputes. Agreement to follow outlined mediation procedures would be included in every society's bylaws.

Third, Alberta Consumer and Corporate Affairs should set up workshop programs to help society members develop decision-making and management skills. Alberta Culture's program for arts groups would provide a useful model to follow.

Henry Dembicki is on the staff of the Edmonton Social Planning Council.

The First Three Years

It has cost about \$9 million during the last three years to implement the Access to Information Act, or about \$1100 an application for information, Treasury Board President Robert de Cotret said Tuesday.

At the same time, the government has collected only \$71 000 in fees, he told the Commons justice committee as it opened public hearings to review the act.

De Cotret, the minister responsible for administering the act, said Ottawa has received 6390 formal requests for government reports, studies and documents under the access laws.

But de Cotret said only eight per cent of applications have resulted in no information being released. While he did not elaborate, the remaining cases would presumably have resulted in some or all information requested being released. However, in many cases applications are simply dropped because of delays or high fees cited.

De Cotret said two-thirds of all refusals are accounted for by only three exemptions - personal information, third-party information and advice and recommendations to government.

He would not comment on a key promise the Conservatives made while in Opposition to bring cabinet documents under the provisions of the act.

From a Canadian Press news story dated 7 May 1986.

Second Class Mail Registration No. 6390

Way is gratefully acknowledged.

News from the Council

New Board of Directors

On 5 March 1986 the members of the Edmonton Social Planning Council elected a new Board of Directors. The members of the Board, each of whom will serve a two-year term are:

Walter Cavalieri Bishop Kent Clarke Caroline Fairbrother (Vice-President) Al Harris (Vice-President) Pat Hirsche (President) Harvey Krahn Cal Lee Terry Lind Elizabeth Massiah Andy McCready (Vice-President) Beth McCullough Sarah Miller Bill Phipps Kathy Vandergrift John Young

Peacemaking Workshop

The Social Justice Institute will be sponsoring a five day workshop titled "Peacemaking: Working for a Just Society" from June 29 to July 4, 1986. Workshop sessions will be held on the following topics:

- Peacemaking in the Face of the **Powers**
- Doing Theology for a Nuclear Age
- Poverty in Canada: An Analysis
- Food and Agriculture
- Crisis in South Africa: Behind the Headlines
- Inner City Experience

For further information or to register, contact the Social Justice Institute at 459-6656 in Edmonton.

New Publications

Two new publications, just made available by the Canadian Council on Social Development through the Edmonton Social Planning Council.

New Age Business: Community Corporations That Work

The author takes us on a journey from Cape Breton to Eastern Quebec and the Basque area in Northern Spain. Three main case studies are examined which help us to understand the emerging long-term economic model called a community development corporation. \$9.95 \$2 postage & handling

What Will Tomorrow Bring? A Study of the Aspirations of Adolescent Women

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