

(English)

GOVERNMENT DOCUMENTS
Release to Archives of Records in
Existence for Thirty Years

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, I should like to announce a policy to make available for research and other public use a large portion of the records of the Canadian government prior to July 1, 1939, as would be consistent with the national interest. The cabinet secretariat and the departments and agencies of government are being asked to transfer to the Public Archives official records which are more than 30 years old to be made available to the public under the normal rules of access in force in the Public Archives.

(2.10 p.m.)

(Translation)

Certain records will be exempted from public access, particularly those the release of which might adversely affect Canada's external relations, violate the right of privacy of individuals, or adversely affect the national security. However, it is the intention that a vast portion of Canada's records prior to mid-1939 will be transferred to the Public Archives during the current year, and that annual transfers be made in subsequent years.

While certain of the records to be made available to the public have already been transferred to the Public Archives, the majority are still in the hands of the cabinet secretariat and the various departments and agencies of government. The volume of them is such that it will take some time to screen and arrange for an orderly flow of documents to the Archives. Within these practical limitations, however, every effort will be made to provide public access to these papers as promptly as possible, beginning on July 1, 1969.

The general rule will be that, with the exceptions noted, all records over 30 years old will be transferred to the Archives and made available to the public. In addition, departments and agencies will be encouraged to transfer to the Archives records less than thirty years old, insofar as this would be consistent with the efficient operation of the departments or agencies involved. Although these more recent records would remain under the control of the minister concerned, they could be made available to the public under terms and conditions to be established by the responsible minister in consultation with the Dominion Archivist. As for records less than thirty years old and which are retained in the custody of the departments and agencies, controlled access may be permitted in special cases, again under terms and conditions to be established by the minister in consultation with the Dominion Archivist.

(English)

Because of the nature of cabinet and cabinet committee documents and minutes, they will in no case be made available for public examination

until they are 20 years old. Former Prime Ministers and ministers will, of course, be given access on request to such of those records as originated during their various periods in office, in order to refresh their memories.

Of particular interest in future years, beginning in 1970, will be the release of annual portions of records of the cabinet war committee for the period 1940-1945. In 1974, records of the deliberations of the cabinet will begin to be made available, the first formal recording of its proceedings having begun in early 1944.

In announcing this policy, I should like to express the government's belief that it will meet with the approval of Canadian scholars, members of learned societies and others interested in the history of Canadian government. In a broader sense, it exemplifies the government's desire to stimulate interest and participation in the affairs of government by Canadians generally.

Hon. Robert L. Stanfield (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, I should like to express my approval of the statement made by the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) who was kind and considerate enough to consult me, and I believe others, about this proposal which I hope will facilitate the work of scholars in our country. I do not know whether it will have any adverse effect upon journalists like Mr. Wilson and Mr. Westell, but subject to that sort of consideration, I think it will certainly be widely approved in the country at large.

Mr. Barry Mather (Surrey): Mr. Speaker, I am sure many members of the house will welcome the announcement made today by the Prime Minister on this very important subject. We feel that it is a step in the right direction that is considerably overdue. As some may recall, a bill was presented by a member on this side of the house at a former session urging something very much in the nature of what has now been put forward. While it is late and meagre, we do feel that action has been taken in the right direction.

(Translation)

Mr. Réal Caouette (Temiscamingue): Mr. Speaker, we in the Ralliement Cr ditiste, approve the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) who has just announced a new policy to make government papers, 30 years old or more, available for research purposes.

Mr. Speaker, the policy will enable men of letters and members of scientific societies in Canada to do their work much more easily and to write an accurate history of Canada.