are panicking and have written masses of paper for the committee stage, attacking the proposals and listing all the difficulties. I must say I was amused.

Wednesday 21 February 1979

Stayed for Gen 29, the committee on official information, with Merlyn Rees in the chair. A draft Green Paper has been produced by Kenneth Berrill [head of the cabinet 'Think Tank'] and it reflected the fact that the Government, while making all the right noises about open government, was justifying why you couldn't have it.

Thursday 15 March 1979

We came on to open government, and Jim said he found the subject unutterably boring. The active and articulate people wanted it but they were a vociferous minority and the rest didn't care . . .

Michael Foot said this 'vociferous minority' in favour of the Freud Bill included the Labour Party and the conference. He had opposed the Freud Bill in the commons but we should support repeal of Section 2 of the *OSA*.

Peter Shore [Environment Secretary] said he had no compunction whatever in opposing the Bill. He spoke with great passion and force. This was a charter for paranoids; it showed a lack of faith in Parliament; it suggested Ministers were incompetent. He thought a select committee was the best means of dealing with disclosure of information. MPs considering the Bill in committee were totally unrepresentative. He, for one, was not at all 'bored' with the subject. A most powerful speech.

David Owen [Foreign Secretary] said we had to kill the Bill but the question of repeal of Section 2 of the *Official Secrets Act* was serious . . .

I said I supported the Freud Bill . . .

Monday 2 April 1979

[A general election is called and a drafting group meets to discuss Labour's manifesto.]

We came on to open government. Jim didn't want all this 'statutory access' put in. Denis [Healey, Chancellor] chimed in, 'The truth is, the people who write this stuff about freedom of information know nothing about the Government whatever'.

I said, 'That's the whole point, Denis', and that really deflated him.

Source: Secrets — newspaper of the Campaign for Freedom of Information, January 1991.

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