

Friends and collaborators

That is not to say that the PM would be hostile to a provincial *pequiste* government headed by Rene Levesque. They are old friends and collaborators. Indeed, during the Quebec provincial election of 1962, Trudeau scolded the NDP for thinking of running one of its own against Levesque in his own riding. He urged, instead, that the NDP support "the only leftist element which has any chance of taking power, that being Rene Levesque" — a minister in the Lesage Liberal government.

In the intervening years, Trudeau has often blasted Quebec political leaders, but never his friend Rene. So it is fair to conclude that he would still be prepared to live with a Levesque government provided — and this is the crucial key — that Levesque doesn't insist on taking Quebec out of Canada. It is on this issue that their immediate interests diverge or converge.

So by encouraging separatists to enter the federal government service — and many have already done so — Trudeau is anticipating a problem. If he can diffuse the discontent and build a bridge of common interest, he might be able to dissuade the *pequistes* from going it alone — a course which would wreck his dreams for Canada as a whole.

We're entitled to know

Having said that, there is one aspect of this current affair that causes me great concern — the indiscriminate and, in my opinion, illegitimate use of the Official Secrets Act.

Who told the RCMP to proceed in this manner? If they did it on their own they should have their knuckles rapped. On the other hand, if their instructions were political, the government's developing paranoia should cause grave concern.

The Official Secrets Act was not intended as a weapon to prosecute every case where "a confidential document has been given to an unauthorized person." If this narrow, literal interpretation were applied, nearly every cabinet minister I have known would be guilty of an offence, as would hundreds of public servants and military officers.

The real issue here is the right of the public to know what is going on. Of course leaks within or near the intelligence service are particularly sensitive. But the government provokes these incidents by refusing to give the taxpayers a great deal more information to which they are reasonably entitled.

Meanwhile the use of the Official Secrets Act, willy nilly, to create a climate of fear in the hope of shutting people up is a strong-arm tactic that cannot be tolerated from a government that is already too immune to checks and balances.

Paul Hellyer was a cabinet minister in the Trudeau government until he resigned in 1969 and later joined the Conservative party. He now writes from the Parliamentary Press Gallery.