

The Campaign for Freedom of Information

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Labour Commitments to Freedom of Information

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Labour Commitments to Freedom of Information

General Election Manifesto Pledges

- October 1974 Promised to “replace the Official Secrets Act by a measure to put the burden on the public authorities to justify withholding information.”
- April 1979 “In central Government, we will... Introduce a Freedom of Information Bill to provide a system of open government, and enact proposals made by the Government in its White Paper to reform Section Two of the Official Secrets Act.”
- June 1983 “Labour will take action to enhance democratic rights and ensure greater openness and accountability in the institutions of government... We shall introduce a Freedom of Information Bill, providing for a genuine system of open government and placing the onus on the authorities to justify withholding information.”
- June 1987 “...the new Parliament will swiftly enact many...worthwhile measures. These will cost little to implement but produce significant improvement in the quality of administration, provision and response to the needs of ordinary citizens. They will include: A Freedom of Information Act, to be accompanied by the repeal of Section Two of the Official Secrets Act.”
- March 1992 “We will start in our first parliamentary session with a Freedom of Information Act which will open up government to the people. Exceptions will be tightly drawn.”
- April 1997 Introduction by Tony Blair: “Labour is committed to the democratic renewal of our country through decentralisation and the elimination of excessive government secrecy.”
- “We are pledged to a Freedom of Information Act, leading to more open government.”

Labour Policy Documents

- December 1997 “This White Paper explains our proposals for meeting another key pledge - to legislate for freedom of information, bringing about more open government. The traditional culture of secrecy will only be broken down by giving people in the United Kingdom the legal right to know. This fundamental and vital change in the relationship between government and governed is at the heart of this White Paper.” *Preface by Tony Blair, ‘Your Right to Know’, Cm 3818*
- December 1997 “This White Paper marks a watershed in the relationship between the government and the people of the United Kingdom. At last there is a government ready to trust the people with a legal right to know. This right is central to a mature democracy...
- It is a new balance with the scales now weighted decisively in favour of openness.” *Foreword by David Clark, ‘Your Right to Know, Cm 3818’*

- September 1996 “Government is too secretive. Too many decisions are taken behind closed doors without proper consultation with the public. Government then rushes new laws through Parliament and bad legislation is passed. People want to be better informed about what government is up to, and be consulted more. New rules on government openness are needed.”
- “We will introduce a Freedom of Information Act to stop unnecessary secretiveness in government. This will establish a general right of access to official information held by national, regional and local public bodies, including quangos....” *New Politics New Britain: Restoring Trust in the way we are Governed*, by Jack Straw, Doug Henderson and Derek Foster
- September 1991 “The Labour government will introduce a package of reforms designed to strengthen editorial independence, including a Freedom of Information Act and the replacement of the Official Secrets Act.” *Arts and Media: Our Cultural Future*
- January 1991 “Labour will introduce a Freedom of Information Act which establishes a general right of access to official information held by national regional and local governments and by public and statutory bodies.” *The Charter of Rights*

Freedom of Information Bills promoted by Labour MPs

- November 1998 *Freedom of Information Bill*, introduced by Labour MP Andrew Mackinlay. Labour sponsors included Dr David Clark, Mark Fisher, Chris Mullin, Tony Wright, Rhodri Morgan and Ronnie Campbell
- June 1992 *Right to Know Bill*, introduced by Labour MP Mark Fisher. Labour sponsors included Clare Short, Chris Smith, Alistair Darling, Jeff Rooker and Clive Soley
- February 1992 *Right to Information Bill*, Labour front bench bill introduced by Robin Corbett. Sponsors included Neil Kinnock, Roy Hattersley, Alistair Darling, Stuart Randall, Joan Lester, Eric Illsley and Andrew Bennett
- December 1991 *Freedom of Information Bill*, introduced by Archy Kirkwood (Lib). Labour sponsors included Chris Smith and Jeff Rooker
- July 1984 *Freedom of Information (No 2) Bill*, introduced by David Steel (Lib). Labour sponsors included Bruce George and Robin Corbett
- January 1981 *Freedom of Information Bill*, introduced by Labour MP Frank Hooley. Labour sponsors included Robin Cook, Michael Meacher, Jeff Rooker, Christopher Price and Philip Whitehead
- July 1979 *Freedom of Information Bill*, introduced by Michael Meacher. Labour sponsors included Robin Cook, Christopher Price and Phillip Whitehead
- January 1979 *Official Information Bill*, introduced by Clement Freud (Lib). Labour sponsors included Robin Cook and Jeff Rooker

- July 1978 *Official Information Bill*, introduced by Robin Cook. Labour sponsors included Jeff Rooker, Jo Richardson, Robert Kilroy-Silk, Max Madden, Christopher Price, Ronald Atkins, George Cunningham and Tom Litterick
- December 1977 *Freedom of Information Bill*, introduced by Labour MP Ronald Atkins. Labour sponsors included Robin Cook, Robin Corbett, Tom Litterick and Dennis Canavan
- February 1977 *Freedom of Information and Privacy Bill* introduced by Labour MP Tom Litterick.

Ministerial Statements

Tony Blair, Prime Minister

- 10/10/97 “The new Labour Government is committed to a major decentralisation and devolution of power across the United Kingdom, as well as to a Freedom of Information Act. I believe that by bringing decision-making closer to the people, we will be better able to protect their fundamental rights and freedoms.” *Speech at the Council of Europe Summit, Strasbourg*
- 20/2/97 “We also propose a Freedom of Information Act to open up our secretive processes. After the Scott inquiry, can anyone be in any serious doubt that such an Act is necessary?” *Opposition Day debate on the constitution*
- 14/9/96 “The case for a Freedom of Information Act and the incorporation of the European Convention on Human Rights into British law is now generally agreed outside the Conservative Party and even by some within it.” *The Economist*
- Summer 1996 “It is time to sweep away the cobwebs of secrecy which hang over far too much government activity. If trust in the people means anything then there can be no argument against a Freedom of Information Act.” *Progress Magazine*
- 25/3/96 “...I think it is true to say that... the efforts of the Campaign have kept this issue high on the political agenda and we now have a situation where action on this issue is supported by four voters in five.

It is not some isolated constitutional reform that we are proposing with a Freedom of Information Act. It is a change that is absolutely fundamental to how we see politics developing in this country over the next few years...

When a health scare like BSE occurs, the public want to know the facts, people want to know what the scientific advice is in full, and they need to be sure that the public interest has always come first. They want to know if there was any relaxation of regulations which resulted in public safety being compromised. They want to know what the risks are and whether the food they eat and the food they feed to their children is safe, and they want to know how to find out. And the whole sorry saga of how this matter has been handled has resulted in the loss of public trust in government. It is because we have given so many absolute assurances in the past, so categorically, without necessarily providing the information to back it up that there is such little faith in what is said now. The

only way to begin to restore people's trust is therefore to be completely open about what the risks are...

The crucial question is does the government regard people's involvement in politics as being restricted to periodic elections? Or, does it regard itself as in some sense in a genuine partnership with people? And the government's attitude to what it is prepared to tell people and the knowledge it will share with them says a great deal about where it stands on that matter.

My argument is that if a government is genuine about wanting a partnership with the people who it is governing, then the act of government itself must be seen in some sense as a shared responsibility and the government has to empower the people and give them a say in how that politics is conducted.

In today's world, I believe that there is a limit to what government can do, and the power of society or community to act and to influence the lives of the individuals within it depends on a far more diverse and diffuse set of relationships than, if you like, a concept of government that would have been more natural or more easily explicable forty or fifty years ago. I don't believe it is possible for government to govern effectively now, unless it governs in some sense in a relationship of partnership with the people whom it is governing. It is one of the reasons why decentralisation of power is actually in the interests of government. People often say to me today: everyone says this before they get into power, then, after they get into power you start to read the words of the government on the screen and they don't seem so silly after all. You can see the point of them and all the rest of it. I actually believe that if we want to make government effective in the modern world it simply is not possible to do that on the basis of government just handing down tablets of stone. In fact, you can see, in my view, both with Scott and BSE it would have been far better if government had been more open, far better actually for the proper conduct of government...

The real problem with the situation at present...[is] the government grants information when it wants to. What is needed is a change in culture and a statutory obligation on government to make it a duty to release information to the people who elect the government.

I believe, if the case was not unanswerable before, Scott has made the case for a Freedom of Information Act absolutely unanswerable now, not just because of how it might have applied in the specific case, and that can be debated, but also because of the sea change it would bring in attitudes towards the release of information.

Our commitment to a Freedom of Information Act is clear, and I reaffirm it here tonight. We want to end the obsessive and unnecessary secrecy which surrounds government activity and make government information available to the public unless there are good reasons not to do so. So the presumption is that information should be, rather than should not be, released. In fact, we want to open up the quango state and the appointed bodies, which will of course exist under any government, but which should operate in a manner which exposes their actions to proper public scrutiny...

I hope you understand from what I have said this evening that I regard it not merely as simply a list of commitments that we give because at some point in time, someone got up and agitated for it and party conference passed a resolution. It is genuinely about changing the relationship in politics today.

There is so much disaffection from politics, so much disillusion with it, and one of the very clear and simple reasons is that we live in a modern and a far better educated and far more open and far more assertive democracy and country and its good that people feel in that way. The irony is that the system of government is about fifty, sixty, seventy years behind the actual feelings and sentiments of the broad majority of people. A Freedom of Information Act is not just important in itself. It is part of bringing our politics up to date, of letting politics catch up with the aspirations of people and delivering not just more open but more effective and efficient government for the future.” *Campaign for Freedom of Information Awards, 25/3/96*

- 12/2/96 “Scott is only a symbol of how secretive the Government has become... Britain should have a proper and full freedom of information act.” *The Independent*
- 7/2/96 “The first right of a citizen in any mature democracy should be the right to information. It is time to sweep away the cobwebs of secrecy which hang over far too much government activity.
- If trust in the people means anything then there can be no argument against a Freedom of Information Act which will give people rights to public information.” *John Smith Memorial Lecture*
- 7/2/96 “It is also time government stopped being so secretive. I want to bring in a Freedom of Information Act to really open up government and give people access to their own personal files.” *The Independent*
- 5/7/95 “On the constitution, we face a massive task that the 1945 government did not address: to modernise our institutions of government to make them fit for the 21st century. There is no place for hereditary voting peers in the House of Lords. There should be no assumption of government secrecy, which is why a Freedom of Information Act is essential.” *Fabian Society marking the 50th Anniversary of the 1945 General Election*
- 30/10/94 “I believe Labour’s constitutional changes - a Freedom of Information Act, proposals to reform the Commons, and a Bill of Rights - would help bring greater confidence to our system of government.” *The Observer*
- 4/10/94 “We will enact a Freedom of Information Act to attack secrecy wherever it exists, public or private sector.” *Leader’s speech to Labour Conference, Blackpool*
- 16/7/94 “Labour would change the whole style of government. Our bill of rights and freedom of information act would get rid of the culture of secrecy.” *Report of speech in Cardiff during Labour leadership campaign, The Guardian*
- 8/7/94 “It is absolutely scandalous that important decisions are taken behind closed doors and are barely reported to national parliaments afterwards.” *During leadership*

election campaign - speech to MEPs in Brussels re secrecy of EU decision making, The Guardian

2/10/92 Labour would end the secrecy surrounding government and introduce “a full and proper freedom of information act to give power to the people of Britain”, Tony Blair, the shadow home secretary, told delegates yesterday. There would be no citizen’s charter “to camouflage the power of vested interests”. The security services would be subject to parliamentary scrutiny and the Official Secrets Act would be reformed. *Report of Labour Party Conference, The Times*

Jack Straw, Home Secretary

27/10/99 “We want to build a culture of openness in the public sector. We want to break down the barriers that may make the individual see the state in terms of Kafka’s Castle. We want to empower public servants at all levels to think positively about what information is of interest to the public and could be released without damaging the business in hand...

Taken together the Human Rights Act and the proposed FOI Bill, will move us from the notion of ‘the ruler and the ruled’. It marks the end of the ‘citizen as subject’ idea which goes back to the earliest forms of enslavement. It puts in place a modern dynamic relationship between the individual citizen and the state.” *Annual Constitution Unit Lecture, Church House*

Autumn 1999 “I want to reaffirm the Government’s commitment and mine to a Freedom of Information Act. Our manifesto promised legislation and we will deliver it. The measure is a key part of our overall programme of constitutional reform and, for that reason, it is vital that what we propose is effective and workable.” *Letter to Rhodri Morgan, former Chairman Public Administration Committee*

24/5/99 “I think that we have got it right. The scales are weighted heavily in favour of openness, and the proposals will radically change the relationship between Government and citizens.

The proposals are not merely abstract rights, to the benefit of academics, historians or constitutional theorists alone, important though all those are. The proposals will benefit everyone and provide access to the sort of information that people really want to know.” *Commons debate on the Freedom of Information Draft Bill*

12/5/99 “Next week, we shall be publishing a draft Freedom of Information Bill. Contrary to what some may have been led to believe, it will be a radical and reforming piece of legislation. It will open up Government in a way which has never been possible before to scrutiny by the individual citizen and give people the democratic power which comes with such knowledge...

There is a scene in ‘Yes Minister’ where Sir Humphrey tells Jim Hacker that ‘Open government is a contradiction in terms.’ ‘You can be open’, he says, ‘or you can have government.’

I don't agree with Sir Humphrey. You can have both - indeed not only are they not mutually exclusive but they actually compliment each other. Good government depends on rigorous external scrutiny and challenge. A government which talks only to itself, as the last one found out, soon loses touch with the people." *Barnett Lecture*

- 10/2/99 "Freedom of information is an essential component of the Government's programme to modernise British politics, as set out in our manifesto. This programme of constitutional aims to involve to involve people more closely in the decisions which affect their lives. Giving people greater access to information is fundamental to that aim." *Written Parliamentary Answer*
- January 1999 "I think that at the end of the day people do have a right to know what government is doing on their behalf - unless there are very good reasons why not. We are here as trustees for the public, and I'm not being pompous about it because it's true. We're not on a frolic of our own, so it *is* about democracy. It's also about accountability. It's then about effectiveness and long term efficiency because if you know that you have to justify a decision in public then it makes you more careful; and then you're a lot more likely to get it right...
- In my view, information held by a department is information held on behalf of the public, and the public ought to know whether it is there or not; that applies particularly to statistics, other factual material, casework instructions and other information about how peoples' rights are being exercised on their behalf." *The Stakeholder, January/February 1999, vol 2 no. 6*
- 26/11/98 "The Government's programme of constitutional reform aims to involve people more closely in decisions that affect their lives. This is done not just through changing institutional structures but also by changing the way our institutions work which means greater openness and accountability.
- "A key element in this will be a Freedom of Information Act. For the first time, every citizen will have the right of access to information held by bodies across the public sector." *Speech to Charter88*
- 3/7/98 "We are altering the balance of power between the citizen and the State to ensure a more accountable, open and honest government. Constitutional changes on devolution, human rights and freedom of information will radically empower individuals and communities by dispersing power from the centre. This is one of many answers to those who claim that we are authoritarians. We are literally handing over a huge amount of power to individual citizens and local communities and away from the central State." *Speech to the Nexus Conference*
- 5/9/96 "Despite vapid musings about open government from ministers, their practice has been to use secrecy, and confidentiality, as a shield against scrutiny... Labour's plans are designed to restore trust in the way we are governed... A Freedom of Information Act will open up government." *The Guardian*
- 29/9/95 "Labour wants to see far greater openness in government. That is why we will introduce a Freedom of Information Act to give people clear rights of access to information collected by public authorities." *Tribune*

Gordon Brown, Chancellor of the Exchequer

10/1/00

“True to our historic values, the Britain of the next decade will champion an open, outward-looking and internationalist approach to Europe and the world...

It will also be a Britain where civic society will become stronger, as British people reassert themselves as citizens of the State and not its subjects...

Reform will not only do more to protect the individual against the abuse of state power - hence the Convention on Human Rights and the proposed law on Freedom of Information - but also evolve a stronger relationship between individual, community and State, the individual empowered by a more supportive community.” *The Times*

September 1997

“That new settlement, in my view, recognises first of all that the individual needs proper and guaranteed protection within a modern constitution to make power - all the sources of power - properly accountable. And that requires a commitment to ensure that people can participate as much as possible in the decisions that affect their lives: that power is devolved as far as possible and that decision making which does take place at the centre is open and accountable.” *Citizens’, Charter88 Newsletter*

1994

“...individuals must have safeguards against entrenched interests, including the state ...That means, in Britain’s case, not just a Bill of Rights but proper safeguards and new rights for individuals against the excesses of monopoly and private power. It means genuine freedom of information in relation not just to government but to the dark recesses of the private sector as well.” *‘The Politics of Potential’, in ‘Reinventing the Left’, Ed. David Miliband, IPPR, 1994*

9/3/92

“We must make freedom of information a priority and in my view there is now an opportunity as well as the demand to act rapidly. It is clear that to make our community more efficient and to protect individual liberty we should have a free flow of information between government and governed. That is why, as Roy Hattersley has outlined, we need a Freedom of Information Act that ensures not only a presumption in favour of disclosure, but also that the public interest defence must be available where there is a question mark over the illegitimate disclosure of information by civil servants...

Freedom of information should apply not just to the apparatus of state but to those dark and secret corners of private power. There should be specific obligations on companies to inform employees, shareholders and the public where it is in the public interest to do so or where it is clearly legitimate for individuals to require such information.

For example, how can we debate seriously the environment, the economy, unemployment, or the state of our public services if we are denied the vital information - the true, not politically doctored facts and figures - which must necessarily form the basis for such a debate?” *Charter88, Sovereignty Lecture*

John Prescott, Deputy Prime Minister

30/6/99 “The draft Freedom of Information Bill creates for the first time powerful new rights of access to information in the public sector... For the first time, people will have the right to find out how schools have made decisions on pupil admissions, how hospitals set priorities for different treatments, how the police have conducted their inquiries - a very important development - and how the Child Support Agency had made decisions about payments. I believe that this is a big step forward.” *Commons oral questions*

Robin Cook, Foreign Secretary

15/2/97 On the first anniversary of the Scott Report, Labour’s foreign affairs spokesman Robin Cook, will say today that there is now “an urgent need for a Freedom of Information Act to end secrecy in government.” *The Independent*

26/2/96 “Secrecy made this scandal possible. The five volumes of the Scott report provide the firmest foundation yet of a case for a freedom of information Act. There were never better witnesses for a freedom of information Act than the long parade of officials and Ministers who queued up to explain to Sir Richard Scott that the public interest was best served by not letting the public know what they were deciding.” *Commons debate on the Scott Report*

1/3/91 “We can also find other ways of liberating and opening up democratic debate so that people can take part in it through, for instance, a Freedom of Information Act.” *Tribune*

27/9/80 “A Labour Party campaign to promote support for a Freedom of Information Act and less secrecy in Whitehall will be launched during the Party’s conference in Blackpool next week. Mr Robin Cook, MP for Edinburgh Central, who will be the acting chairman of the Labour Committee for a Freedom of Information Act, said that more open government must be a candidate for priority action.” *Report in The Guardian*

Lord Irvine, Lord Chancellor

22/10/99 “Openness is fundamental to good government. Confidence in government has been undermined in the United Kingdom by a culture of secrecy. Our Manifesto therefore included a commitment to introduce a Freedom of Information Act, to open up public organisations and make the whole of government more accountable to the people...

Our first two legislative programmes did not include a freedom of information bill. There were those who thought that we had lost our appetite for openness, at the first taste of office. In fact, we simply wanted sufficient time to devise from within government, a regime across government, which would be as liberal as possible consistent with the protection of the national interest. Complex problems do not

benefit from hasty solutions. One advantage in delaying the introduction of freedom of information legislation is that we have been able to consider, and to learn from the experience of other countries...

The Act will mark a watershed in the relationship between the government and people of the United Kingdom. The British people will, at last, have the right to know what is being said and done in their name; and they will be better equipped to be active participants in political discourse on the future of their country.” *Speech on ‘Britain’s Programme of Constitutional Change’, University of Leiden*

17/8/98

“There were many who doubted our commitment to reform before the election. Could anyone be a doubter today? When, in the early days of this Government we declined to legislate on freedom of information by the easy expedient of putting our predecessors’ code of practice, unchanged, on a statutory basis, there were no shortage of early fingers on the betrayal button. What we did was to take a few months to do a proper, home-grown, job which has been widely welcomed as a freedom of information regime as strong as any - and fulsomely praised by the Campaign for Freedom of Information. This Government is the enemy of the culture of secrecy that flourished under our predecessors...

The White Paper setting out the Government’s position was published just before Christmas. Our proposals start from the premise that *open* government is *good* government.

...in most cases information will only be withheld if its disclosure would cause ‘substantial’ harm, as distinct from a ‘mere harm’ test or a ‘simple harm’ test. This change of emphasis has been widely welcomed as a key concept in creating one of the most liberal freedom of information regimes in the world.” *Speech to the Conference on Constitutional Reform, Centre for Public Law, Cambridge*

Lord Williams of Mostyn, Attorney General

10/02/99

“One of the truly inexpressible, ineffable delights of membership of the Labour Party is attendance at the Labour Party Conference. I was there when Jack Straw made his speech. In September last year, he said to rapturous applause - the Prime Minister repeated it - that we would introduce a freedom of information bill.

I say as firmly as I can - and I cannot over emphasise - this Government’s commitment to the introduction of a Freedom of Information Bill. There is now growing a new relationship between government and the public. There is no doubt about that. The wind has changed...

We believe that a Freedom of Information Act is the central part of our agenda for change. We mean to introduce it...

I was asked to indicate and demonstrate yet again the commitment of the Government. I say again that we remain fully committed to freedom of information, to promoting a radical change across government in the way government conduct business, and to a new relationship between government and

the citizens they serve. I do not think I can make it plainer than that.” *Lords’ Debate on the Lucas Bill*

Lord Falconer, Cabinet Office Minister

20/4/00 “The right to know, while it cannot be unfettered, has long been neglected in this country... Everyone will benefit from this Bill. It will deliver a more responsive, better informed and accountable public service.” *Freedom of Information Bill, Lords’ second reading*

Peter Mandelson, Secretary of State for Northern Ireland

20/11/97 “The rock on which that partnership is founded is trust and without openness and transparency in our dealings with the British people there will be no trust.” *The Times*

8/5/97 “I must disappoint you and say that freedom of information has not been dropped and it will feature in the Queen’s Speech. But we have to bring forward a white paper on it first of all. I mean, we can’t just pull off some bill from the shelf and introduce it straight away, but we are very committed to it and that’s why we are going to introduce a white paper and to start the whole thing going because it is a very important issue.” *ITN ‘House to House’ programme, Channel 4*

19/2/93 “I strongly support” the Right to Know Bill. *Second reading debate of the Right to Know Bill*

Dr David Clark, former Minister for the Cabinet Office

13/1/99 “I would argue, and the Government recognise, that information is a critical part of the democratic process. It should not be a bolt-on aspect, but an intrinsic part of the democratic process. The Labour Party recognise that in opposition, and we tried to put it in practice from day one in government...

I believe that if we do the right thing, we can move from being one of the most secretive societies in the western world to being one of the most open. If we do, we shall re-engage with our citizens and we shall help commerce and industry. I passionately believe that we shall also start to rebuild trust in our democratic process.” *Commons debate on government information*

6/7/98 “It is interesting that this House appreciates how critical freedom of information is to our democracy. We have been through a difficult time and, because we are all aware of the breakdown of trust between Governments and citizens, we are beginning to realise, as we move into the next millennium, that democracy is more than just casting a vote every five years, important though that may be. I am enthused by the mood of the House, which showed that the hon. Members

recognise that freedom of information and the right of our citizens to know information that affects them is a critical part of our democratic institutions...

No one should doubt our commitment to freedom of information. It is clear in our manifesto... Freedom of information is a key part - I would argue, a central part - of the programme to modernise British politics.” *Commons debate on freedom of information*

2/2/98

“[the white paper] now has the complete and utter endorsement of the Government as a whole, and is not just some result of an adventurous element going off on a limb. It is the centre of the government’s approach to constitutional reform.

This is the considered view of the government. Of course we will listen. But on the other hand we will need a lot of persuading to change it. This isn’t something that is going to be watered down as we progress along the way.” *Campaign for Freedom of Information Conference on the FoI White Paper*

16/12/97

“When I came into the job eight months ago, I was given a list of our manifesto commitments that affected our department. One of the key things was freedom of information. I was told quite straight by my Permanent Secretary that very little work had gone on in preparation for such a bill because the previous administration had decided that they were not going to follow the legislative route and were content with the code. I was then faced with the option that we could instead have a short-cut bill, which would have meant putting the code in a legislative framework. However, I did not think this was right and I thought it was worth waiting in the House for an all-singing, all-dancing white paper and bill.” *Oral evidence to Public Administration Select Committee*

Mo Mowlam, Minister for the Cabinet Office

24/8/95

“We want more accountability in the European Parliament and greater transparency in the decisions of the Council of Ministers. Add to this a Freedom of Information Act, the guarantee of basic rights to all citizens by the incorporation of the European Convention of Human Rights...and Labour offers a pretty heavy and radical package that will change the nature of power and increase the people’s ability to have greater influence on the decisions that affect them.” *The Times*

15/7/93

“Without substantive changes and without the kind of Right to Know Bill for which we argued, and despite the many pages of rhetoric in the White Paper, ours will remain the most secretive Government in the western world.” *Debate on the Open Government Code of Practice*

20/1/93

“It is a duty of MPs to represent their constituents and demand open government. We desperately need a Freedom of Information Act to allow the spotlight to be trained on the decadence in the Establishment.” *The Times*

Chris Smith, Secretary of State for Culture, Media & Sport

- 1/10/96 “The commitment that we have as a party to introducing freedom of information legislation - which I feel very strongly should be one of the very early things that the Labour government does - its doesn't cost Gordon Brown anything, so we can do it - the sooner we do it the better. Having freedom of information legislation will actually transform that relationship, because we will be able to know, the general public will be able to know, Parliament will be able to know, things that at the moment are hidden from us. The very basic point that has to be made is that in a democracy, if the people are going to make decisions then information is the key to having power. If the people are going to have real power they have to have information.” *Speech to the Campaign for Freedom of Information fringe meeting, Labour Conference*
- 8/1/92 “People ought to have a right to know what their regulators and legislators and governors are up to. I'm delighted that my own Party has given a very firm commitment to introduce Freedom of Information legislation early in the next Parliament.” *Letter to the Campaign for Freedom of Information*

Geoff Hoon, Secretary of State for Defence

- 3/6/98 “The Freedom of Information White Paper defines and increases the public's right to access to information. It is the most radical information access package ever put forward by a British Government.” *Speech at the Public Record Office*

Alistair Darling, Secretary of State for Social Security

- 17/5/91 “Does not the Minister think that it is absurd that in many cases information about the British Government's actions is obtained from the United States? The United States has to declare some of its dealings with our Government and the information can be freely obtained under its Freedom of Information Act. We then receive that information by reading American newspapers.
- Does the Minister accept that there is a distinction between matters of genuine national security and the political advice that Ministers receive? No one would suggest that information on national security should be made commonly available, but there is a case for enabling citizens to discover information on matters such as health and safety. I do not understand why the Government will not do that and why they are so obsessed with secrecy and withholding information. That disease has affected many Governments, but this one seems worse than many of their predecessors.” *Commons debate on constitutional reform*

Jeff Rooker, Minister for Social Security

- 19/2/93 “In a democracy, opinions can be exchanged between those in the know until the sun sets each day, but unless those whom we seek to serve can share in the

discussions, democracy becomes a sham. However good we or outside experts think our ideas are, those ideas will fizzle out if we seek to impose them on a public who, by and large, are kept in ignorance, they will not be accepted. It is crucial that the public should be enlightened about why and how decisions are made...

I said that without freedom of information there could not be a right to know and that without that right the citizen is left at the mercy of a society dominated by industry and the advances in technology, which puts the liberty and safety of individual citizens at stake.” *Second reading debate of the Right to Know Bill*

Barbara Roche, Home Office Minister of State

19/2/93 “Most people’s thirst for the right to know rightly and understandably stems from daily matters. They want to know how safe their car is, whether the food that they buy is properly and hygienically produced, or what is the safety record of the ferry on which they cross the channel... I urge the Government to support the Bill.” *Second reading debate of the Right to Know Bill*

Michael Meacher, Minister for the Environment

25/7/79 “So much public money is wasted on indifferent propaganda and some dotty advertising campaigns that surely, even in this new era of austerity, we should be able to contemplate some extra expenditure to make government more accessible, comprehensible and accountable. I submit that if the government are serious about wanting to set the people free, the [Freedom of Information] Bill should be their top priority.” *Commons debate*

Kate Hoey, Minister of Sport

19/2/93 “It is time that our citizens had free access to information that affects all aspects of their lives and that we recognised that information is power...

My party is committed to freedom of information. Before the general election, we promised that a freedom of information bill would be top of our agenda...

We must face the fact that politicians on the whole are not believed. We are viewed by many people as being liars and cheats who are prepared to cover up all manner of things. When there is no right to know and no freedom of information, it is difficult to disprove that view.” *Second reading debate on the Right to Know Bill*

Dr Kim Howells, Minister for Consumer & Corporate Affairs

19/2/93 “Does my hon. Friend [Mark Fisher MP] agree that [the Right to Know Bill] would also be very useful from the point of view of shining the rather tarnished image of politicians?” *Second reading debate on the Right to Know Bill*

Alan Howarth, Minister for the Arts

20/4/93 “One of the key arguments in favour of freedom of information legislation is that Government efficiency is likely to be improved if the basis on which decisions are made is more visible.” *Committee stage of the Right to Know Bill*

19/2/93 “The hon. Gentleman [Mark Fisher MP] has referred to the culture in which decisions are made, and thereby to the quality of public debate. Does he agree that the great prize to be had from freedom of information is the better opportunity and encouragement that it would give the press and broadcasters to engage in serious and substantial discussion of the important issues concerning the state of society and public policy?” *Second reading debate on the Right to Know Bill*

Baroness Symons, Defence Procurement Minister

10/10/97 “But the Joint Declaration is an antidote to any complacency about the bilateral relationship. It identifies a number of important areas where there is plenty of scope for us to co-operate more...in the task of opening up government and bringing it closer to the people, a priority our two governments very much share. We have much to learn from Canada, for example in the area of freedom of information.” *Speech to the Canadian Foreign Service*

Jack Cunningham, former Agriculture Secretary

13/1/99 “The Government’s major programme of constitutional reform... aims to involve people more closely in decisions that affect their lives...

The key component of the programme is a freedom of information Act. We believe that such an Act will lead to greater accountability, more involvement of the public in decision making, better decision making across the public sector and, ultimately, better government.” *Commons debate on Government Information*

2/1/88 ‘The Windscale cover-up underlined the need for a Freedom of Information Act, shadow environment secretary John Cunningham said yesterday.’ *Morning Star*

Frank Dobson, former Health Secretary

8/2/93 “I am continually frustrated by the cloak of secrecy which covers life in Britain. The hypocrisy of Mr. Major’s claim that he wishes to “blow away some of the

cobwebs of secrecy” is shown by his own cynical involvement in the cover-up over Iraqgate; by the cynical signing of immunity certificates by Michael Heseltine and two other Cabinet Ministers; and by Mr. Heseltine’s refusal to publish either the background information on the pit closures contained in the recent Boyds Report which reveals that many of these pits are economically viable.

The Labour Party is totally committed to freedom of information. Before the last General Election, Roy Hattersley promised that a Freedom of Information Bill would be in our first Queen’s Speech and Mark Fisher’s Bill is based on that draft. At Labour Party Conference last year, John Smith stressed that freedom of information was at the heart of his campaign strategy.” *Letter to constituent*

Mark Fisher, former Minister for the Arts & sponsor of the Right to Know Bill

19/2/93

“The principle behind the Bill is straightforward and simple. In a democracy, free access to information should be a basic, fundamental right...The Bill is based on the belief that we, the public, have a right to know what the Government are doing in our name, with our money, on our behalf. That is necessary because Britain is still one of the most secretive societies in the western world and one of the few democracies not to have some form of freedom of information legislation. Neither the public nor Members of Parliament have an absolute right to information. We receive it by the grace and favour of Ministers and civil servants.” *Second reading debate on the Right to Know Bill*

John Smith, former Leader of the Labour Party

28/9/93

“Democracy should be revitalised to protect the fundamental rights of every citizen, regardless of race, colour, gender or creed, and government made open, accountable and close to the people it served.

“That is why the next Labour government must enact a Bill of Rights, legislate for freedom of information.” *Leader’s speech to Labour Conference, reported in The Independent 29/9/93*

Neil Kinnock, former Leader of the Labour Party

2/10/86

“I am a believer in greater freedom of information and more open government at all levels. A Freedom of Information Act, requiring a range of public authorities to make information available to the public, will consequently be among the ways in which the next Labour Government will promote those objectives of candour in government.” *Letter to the Editor, The Guardian*

1984 “A thriving democracy depends on clear, full information, fairly presented, for all our citizens. Information is the lever of power and in a free society free people should have maximum access to and control over that lever.

I want to emphasise both the importance of the issue itself and the commitment of the Labour Party to new freedom of information legislation which will strengthen Britain’s democracy by requiring authorities to justify withholding information.”
Letter to the Campaign for Freedom of Information

Roy Hattersley, former Deputy Leader of the Labour Party & Shadow Home Secretary

9/7/91 “...You therefore have my unequivocal assurance that during the first year of the next Labour government a freedom of information Act will become law.”

21/1/91 “Up to now we have rightly refused to say which legislation has been earmarked for the first year in government. But anyone who looks at our detailed plans for a Freedom of Information Act must know that it is not only suitable for early enactment. It is ready for early enactment. If a Labour government was elected on Thursday I would be able to send the headings of a Bill to parliamentary draughtsmen on the following day.” *Campaign for Freedom of Information Annual Awards*

15/1/88 “When next the Labour party is in government, I have no doubt that there will be times when Ministers curse under their breath the passing of this Bill through all its stages, because there will be things that we shall want to suppress. Looking at the matter with the objectivity of Opposition, we realise that it will be the same in the future as it was in the past. We shall often want to suppress things that we should not be allowed to suppress. The House of Commons should prevent us from doing that when our time comes, as it should prevent the Government from doing it now.” *Second reading debate of the Protection of Official Information Bill*