

ANTISECRET BILLS OFFERED IN HOUSE

Rep. Moorhead Proposes
Limits on Classification

By DAVID K. SHIPLER

The chairman of the House Foreign Operations and Government Information Subcommittee said yesterday that he would push for two pieces of legislation this session that are designed to give the public access to certain government secrets.

The chairman, Representative William S. Moorhead, Democrat of Pennsylvania, said he had introduced a bill that would shift control over the Government's classification system from the President to Congress. A second measure, he said, would strengthen the Freedom of Information Act.

Mr. Moorhead's subcommittee, which is part of a House Committee on Government Operations, has held hearings during the last two years on Government secrecy. He said several witnesses responsible for security had estimated that 75 to 99 per cent of the material that was labeled top secret, secret or confidential did not warrant such classification.

The Pennsylvania Democrat made his remarks in a paper and during a discussion at a seminar entitled "Secrecy, Democracy and Foreign Policy," sponsored by New York University's Center for International Studies.

Many Concur on Need

The two-day conference brought together legislators, Government officials, lawyers and newsmen from Britain, Canada and the United States. Many of them agreed that while some secrecy was necessary in government, much of it in all three countries was designed simply to protect officials from embarrassment.

William Clark, who was press secretary to Prime Minister

Anthony Eden, remarked that the Official Secrets Act in Britain was usually invoked to prevent the disclosure of information that might lead to "the overthrow of the minister — that's most important."

The second worry in importance was "the overthrow of the pound," he said, and finally "the overthrow of the country."

Despite the protests of legislators who claimed frustration at being denied information by the executive branch, Bruce Rankin, the Canadian Consul General here, said that while he was serving in various posts all over the world, he had rarely met a Member of Parliament who seemed interested in government briefings on the country.

"The majority of them are there for a junket," he said.

Would Create Commission

Representative Moorhead's bill on classification would create a nine-member commission to regulate the United States Government's classification system. Three members would be named by the Speaker of the House, three by the President pro tem of the Senate and three by the President.

Under the measure, officials who are found to over-classify would be disciplined, and most material would be automatically downgraded and declassified after no more than three years. The bill is similar to one introduced last year.

His proposals for strengthening the Freedom of Information Act, he said, derived from the unsuccessful lawsuit filed by 33 members of Congress in an effort to obtain the Government's assessment of the environmental impact of the nuclear test on the Aleutian Island of Amchitka.

The Supreme Court ruled in favor of the Government. Mr. Moorhead said the amendment to the act would require a judge to examine contested documents in chambers before issuing a ruling.