

TELESAT CANADA BILL

SECOND READING

The Senate resumed from Thursday, June 19, the adjourned debate on the motion of Hon. Mr. Desruisseaux for the second reading of Bill C-184, to establish a Canadian corporation for telecommunication by satellite.

Hon. John M. Macdonald: Honourable senators, this debate stands adjourned in the name of Senator Grosart. He is unable to be present this afternoon, and has asked me to state that he feels there are some sound reasons why the bill should go before a committee tomorrow. Rather than delay its second reading, he would choose to make his remarks on the bill before the committee. If that is satisfactory honourable senators, the bill can be read the second time this afternoon. I understand that Senator Fournier (Madawaska-Restigouche) wishes to speak to the subject matter now.

Hon. Mr. Benidickson: To which committee would this bill be referred?

Hon. Mr. Macdonald: We would suggest that it be referred to the Standing Senate Committee on Transport and Communications.

Hon. Mr. Martin: Agreed.

Hon. Edgar Fournier: Honourable senators, I regret that I am ill-prepared to speak on this bill due to the short notice, but there are one or two remarks I should like to make.

[Translation]

I would like to congratulate Senator Desruisseaux for having introduced the bill on satellites in such an interesting way. Certainly, among the members of this house, he was the most qualified for this task, because through his close association with newspaper publishing and the operation of radio and television stations he has become quite conversant with the matter. His speech probably required several hours of work and research, and I wish to congratulate him on his performance.

[English]

The honourable Senator Desruisseaux made a long speech in sponsoring the bill, in the course of which he gave considerable detail, indicating many hours of preparation. This leads me to believe that there are many details about which we are ill-informed. Where and when all this will stop, nobody knows.

In the course of his remarks Senator Desruisseaux said that there was a need for "a Canadian satellite to serve the needs of a Communications system in Canada." I do not dispute the need. I am worried about whether we can afford a satellite, or can afford to get into this type of business. I say this because I do not think we know very much about where we are going. I believe we have a tiger by the tail. Senator Desruisseaux also said:

The price tag quoted for the system is between \$60 million and \$70 million.

Later he added:

It is expected that bringing the ground stations up to strength and providing the back-up satellite would probably eventually raise the cost well beyond \$100 million.

We are now approaching \$100 million, and my point is that we do not know exactly what we are doing. We have very little information on this proposed satellite. I believe the timing is wrong and that we are working on something about which nobody knows. The timing is especially bad at this time, when the Government is introducing an austerity program such as has never been known in Canada. All we hear about are cuts in public works, in NATO, in the armed forces—cuts, cuts, cuts. I do not disagree with that. I think it is time the Government brought some controls to an end and gave us a balanced budget. While on the one hand there is an attempt to make these cuts, on the other hand we are embarking on something about which we know very little. I believe that we should be shown more clearly where we are going before becoming involved in this project.

It was said that this will be a joint organization in which the Canadian Government will take part. With that I might agree. Perhaps the Government could provide protective legislation for Canada. But taking an active part by putting into the company several million dollars, perhaps much more than we expected, is an idea I hesitate to go along with. Legislation to protect the company should be provided, but not legislation to pull the company out of a possible financial embarrassment later.

We do not know how much the satellite will cost. It is said it will cost \$70 million, with an expected life of seven years. It must be remembered that the satellite of today will be obsolete tomorrow. I believe that the amount the federal Government puts into the satellite