

*Telesat Canada Act*

Secondly, will some channels be used only for educational programs? Since education is a provincial responsibility, were the provinces and specially Quebec consulted on that matter? In the affirmative, what conclusions were arrived at in talks with the province of Quebec, for example?

Mr. Speaker, I ask the minister whether the bill meets the requirements of the provinces.

Will Quebec be able to rent or purchase time on a channel for educational programs?

Mr. Speaker, one cannot help but wonder whether the government of Canada intends to allow Quebec, if it so wishes, to take part and to co-operate in the construction of a telecommunication satellite broadcasting in French and to allow it to use a foreign satellite to transmit its educational programs. For us Quebecers, that is a fundamental question within the framework of the constitution as it now stands, having regard especially to the progress in the fields of technology and electronics, that is foreseeable today.

In this connection, I also wonder whether the federal government is ready and willing to let Quebec negotiate, such agreements internationally, or whether it intends to carry out such negotiations itself. In other words, has there been any agreement with Quebec in this regard? If so, what is the nature of such agreement? If not, is such an agreement expected?

● (3:30 p.m.)

Mr. Speaker, I am sure the minister, being a responsible man, will make a note of my questions. I shall ask a messenger to take them to him so that he may answer them when the time comes to close this debate.

Mr. Speaker, we, who are French-speaking, would like to be sure that the minister is aware of these questions that come to our minds and that he intends to supply answers.

I suggest that the minister will wish to answer our questions before the bill is carried and referred back to the committee, because it is possible that in trying to favour national unity, through a communication system of high quality and at very high cost, we may contribute to the division of the country. Then, Mr. Speaker, all would be lost.

A real danger threatens. Indeed, the present bill does not take into account agreements with the provinces, nor, for that matter, the two great cultures of Canada.

In my opinion, that represents a serious anomaly, and if the minister does not throw

[Mr. Fortin.]

some light on the situation by answering some of the questions I asked a while ago, we will be led to believe that the federal government wants to control not only the medium but the message of the programs televised by the different channels.

In his first speech, the minister spoke of the very great political and economic implications this bill will have. However, he seems to have forgotten, involuntarily I hope, the enormous social and cultural implications which will also proceed from the bill.

Mr. Speaker, just as we have rich provinces and poor provinces, so also we must recognize today without danger of being mistaken that there are great regional economic inequalities which are now known as "regional disparities". It is so true that a new department has just been established to deal with them.

Just as it is no longer conceivable to have a uniform economic policy for all Canada, so also we cannot set up a uniform communications policy for the whole of Canada.

Indisputable phenomenon: Canada is a mosaic of provinces—great men said so—remarkable for its two great cultures: the French culture and the English culture.

At this stage of the creation of this new Canadian corporation for telecommunication, known as "Telesat Canada", the house has no guarantee at all that the cultural and educational rights of the provinces will be preserved, guaranteed, since the Canadian constitution itself does not provide, and did not provide in 1867, for the possibility that such an evolution in the field of communications would make it necessary to create a new department, the Department of Communications, to meet the needs of a modern Canada.

Mr. Speaker, the problem is right there and it is not by playing the ostrich that we shall find an answer.

Everybody must admit that the field of communications, whether it be telecommunication by satellites, educational television or the granting of broadcasting licences, is most important and likely to infringe upon the rights of the provinces which have regional interests to protect including cultural interests and others.

Of course, there are always national interests to safeguard but let us not, for goodness sake, forget the regional interests.

So, in practice, we cannot agree with the idea of establishing a new corporation for telecommunication before settling that matter of infringement and jurisdiction.