

*Government Organization*

genuine interest in the matter under discussion. If I speak for a shorter period I hope it will not be taken to mean I am any less interested.

I should like to begin by saying that I think it augurs well for the future of Canadian communications policy that this department will have at its head the former Postmaster General. The minister has the reputation of being a no-nonsense type of man who is action oriented. The minister, for some time now, has been involved in this new area of responsibility. We hope before the passage of many months he will be able to use his energies to come up with a communications policy that will have much greater definition and precision than is the case at the present time.

I for one feel it is rather difficult to speak on the merits of the bill before us because it refers to the creation of a new department of communications but does not mention the policy which will lie behind the department. This policy will have to be implemented and administered by the minister and, in large part, it is still an unknown factor.

I should like to make reference to some comments made yesterday by the Leader of the Opposition and by my leader when they said, in effect that a bill to reorganize various government departments in itself means very little. I would go further and say it means almost nothing until such time as we can see clearly what kind of policies these departments will be putting into effect. Fortunately, in the case of the department of communications there seems to be something genuine about reorganization. It is logical that we should consolidate the Post Office Department and certain other communications branches under one minister in one department. It is more logical than certain other aspects of the reorganization bill which is before us.

I do not mind saying that I believe the reorganization of other departments into a Department of Regional Economic Expansion will likely be a hoax. The references that have been made in the past few days to the government being committed to some kind of new policy in respect of regional economic development or changing the policy with regard to ARDA, FRED and all the other programs, is nothing but window dressing and may well prove to be a fraud. Only a short while ago in this House of Commons we gave approval to the establishment of a Department of Consumer and Corporate Affairs. That, in itself, was a piece of governmental administrative reorganization. Since

[Mr. Schreyer.]

that department has been organized and headed by the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs the increase in the cost of living in this country has escalated beyond what it was before that minister took office. It seems to me the kindest thing the minister could do would be to remove himself from the office and recommend that the department be disbanded.

When a policy lacks definition one might ask what the point is in having such a department at all or what the point is in having a reorganization to change its name. I do not wish to take any more time in venting my dissatisfaction in respect of many aspects of this reorganization bill because I understand today we are expected to deal primarily with the subject matter of communications and communications policy. I should like, however, to take another second or two to say that my disenchantment with the Department of Consumer and Corporate Affairs and the minister is equalled by my disenchantment with the minister responsible for housing. We can have all the administrative reorganization we like in this area and it will prove to be of no consequence at all so long as we have interest rates which are at the present levels. Only if the government is really serious about doing something relative to interest rates in this country will anything effective be accomplished in respect of housing construction. It seems to me it is futile and is perpetrating a hoax to pretend that the establishment of a task force or division or branch within a department will have any concrete effect on the problem of housing.

If I might return to the establishment of a Department of Communications, I should like to say that I found the minister's remarks earlier this afternoon enlightening and edifying, as they usually are. He used one analogy in particular which I thought was very appropriate. He referred to communications in our time as being the central nervous system of a society. This is an analogy which I like and in which I concur. If communications is the central nervous system of our society, it is all the more important that the government, the political instrument of the people, have some definite and close regulation of and involvement in that central nervous system. I refer particularly to the advent of communications by satellite. The minister said much about this in his speech this afternoon, as he has over the course of the past several months.

We all await with interest information concerning the policy of the government with