

Telesat Canada Act

anyone can support it. What are the arguments for nationalization or public ownership? Sometimes the argument is no more than administrative feasibility. Sometimes it is not a question of whether public ownership is more moral or less so than private ownership. If a project is vital to the national interest of a country, the costs of its operation have to be taken into consideration. We have experience with privately-owned corporations regulated by government where there is virtually a duplication of effort. The private corporation is trying to confuse the picture and the government is trying to clear it up to see what the true picture is. When the situation reaches that position, it is no longer a matter of ideology whether these outfits become public corporations. It is necessity for accounting and efficiency purposes that they go into the public domain. In this way the obvious accounting difficulties are eliminated as well as the need to regulate and for them justify their position as private corporations.

● (4:10 p.m.)

Why, then, has the minister brought in the legislation in this form? Perhaps he will say he brought it in for the reason he gave in his speech yesterday. But I and many other people, I believe, find his speech most unconvincing. If I am wrong I would welcome the intervention of the minister to say that my suspicions are unfounded, but I suspect that he and the government have been put into a box. Perhaps the private interests have said that if the government undertakes this project on its own as a completely public corporation they will not use the satellite but will find other ways to develop their programs rather than participate in the satellite program. It may be that the minister has been forced to take in both the public and the common carriers in order to find enough customers for his satellite to justify its cost.

I say this with some sadness because I do not wish to downgrade the minister's vision and his sense of the future. But if he has got himself into this box it is only because the government has refused to use the power at its disposal. It has refused to say that it has the right to act in the national interest and ask the common carriers and others to go along with the people in the national interest. The minister has backed off. I believe that some day he or his successor will have to stand up in the house and explain as well as possible the reason the legislation before us

[Mr. Saltsman.]

today no longer serves the purpose a few years from now and must be changed.

The minister has said he does not want to see the satellite become a burden. Perhaps I might use his exact words. He said that the government at the taxpayers' expense could build and operate the system by itself but that they had rejected this alternative. Why? If it is to be profitable enough to entice private investment, why does he reject that method if it would result in a profit for the public of Canada? Is it so difficult to raise the financing for profitable operations? I do not believe that is the case. Others are able to do so, and I am sure the credit of the government of Canada is better than that of most other organizations.

Why has the minister rejected the idea of this being a public operation? It would not be a burden on Canadians to finance it publicly if it is to be profitable. It is difficult to understand what the minister's argument is. On the one hand he talks about the national interest and the need to do things that are necessary for Canada. On the other hand he talks about making a profit. He brings in different groups of people who are in opposition to each other; their purposes are not all the same. He brings this jungle into the house and expects us to accept it at face value. I can only say that the minister will have to do much better than this. He will have to be far more convincing in his arguments against public ownership than he has been up to the present.

[*Translation*]

Mr. René Matte (Champlain): Mr. Speaker, I would like to support the remarks made a few minutes ago by my colleague, the hon. member for Lotbinière (Mr. Fortin), and I would particularly insist that the minister answer the questions which have been put to him before this bill is deferred to the committee, so that we can know at the outset what will be the scope of the participation of French Canadians or Quebecers to this bill.

It is all very well Mr. Speaker, to say:

—by combining into a single entity three interests or groups: the government, private industry, which in this instance means the common carriers, and the public at large.

In principle, this seems to reflect very well the intent of the government to establish this corporation. However, in practice, when one speaks of "the government", it is to communications that one is referring and therefore to