

[English]

Because the Telecommission report is to date the most complete and most coherent discussion of telecommunications problems and opportunities in Canada, I earnestly commend it to the attention of all members of this House and to all Canadians who have an interest in the rational and equitable development of telecommunications facilities in our country.

This document represents the final distillation of the work of 43 separate study groups. It represents an almost unprecedented collaboration of hundreds of individuals, groups, institutions, departments and agencies of government, private firms and universities. The object of this work was to collect all the information possible on which to base sound judgments in the months and years ahead. The next step in the continuing search for better arrangements and better policies will be, as I have said, the white paper.

Hon. Robert L. Stanfield (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, the minister has expressed the hope that we will all read the report carefully. I can assure him that we shall. I am particularly tantalized by his use of the words "white paper", and I shall read the report with great care in the hope that it may include some method of getting through to the Minister of Finance (Mr. Benson).

Mr. David Orlikow (Winnipeg North): Mr. Speaker, we have not, of course, yet had an opportunity to read "Instant World", a document which was certainly not prepared instantly. The whole field is a tremendously complex one.

The minister in his statement talked about the need for the equitable development of telecommunications facilities in our country. This will not be easy to achieve. We see, for example, that common carriers such as Bell Canada would like to expand into areas concerned with computers and data processing. If they can do so this would, in effect, prevent the development of a separate computer industry. We see the uncontrolled development in recent years of cable television systems in such a way as to threaten the continuation, let alone the development, both of the CBC and the private CTV television networks and their ability to produce programs and obtain the advertising necessary to pay for those programs because of the fragmentation of the market which has followed the widespread proliferation of cable television systems. These are just two examples within the telecommunications field of the tremendous problems we face.

We shall, of course, read the report with a great deal of interest. We trust that in addition to posing questions with which most of us are already familiar it will offer some solutions, some answers, to the problems we face.

[Translation]

Mr. André Fortin (Lotbinière): Mr. Speaker, in short, in his statement the Minister of Communications (Mr. Kierans) announced the publication of another white paper which will define the future government policy about telecommunications.

Request for Skagit River Valley Study

Now I would like to remind my hon. colleagues of the various stages the government went through before really doing something.

On September 18, 1969 it announced the establishment of the Telecommission to undertake a process of study and consultation on the state of telecommunications in Canada and on present and future needs of the Canadian people in this field. To this end, the government formed over 43 separate study groups.

On April 7, 1971 it tabled in the House of Commons the conclusions of those studies that do not express the official opinions of the federal government nor what policy it intends to follow in this field.

Later, the government will begin, and I quote: a process of further consultation with the representatives of provincial governments, private industry, users and other interested groups.

Those studies and consultations will result in the presentation of a white paper on the subject.

The publication of a white paper does not constitute a concrete policy; it is merely a means whereby the government can probe public opinion and encourage interested parties or groups to make what remarks they feel are timely.

I therefore regret that the minister did not, in his statement today, give us an exact date on which a Canadian telecommunications policy could be implemented. I feel that studies and research must not be neglected in that field. But it seems that such studies and research works have become an excuse for the government not to take real action. I believe there are problems related to the provinces which the government is keeping from us.

Canada greatly needs a national policy taking regional or provincial characteristics in the field of telecommunications. The importance of that field is undeniable. Mr. Speaker, and its implications for our economic, political, social and particularly cultural life will be considerable. To be sure, there should be nothing left out in the preliminary stage consisting in research and studies, but this stage should not be indefinitely drawn out to serve as an excuse for lack of action and of a specific and up-to-date policy.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, the report will no doubt get the full attention of members of our group, but the minister's evasive statement only increases our impatience for the adoption by Canada of a modern policy, taking into consideration rights and interests of the provinces in the very important field of telecommunications.

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● (2:20 p.m.)

[English]

POWER

SKAGIT RIVER VALLEY—TABLING OF REFERENCE TO INTERNATIONAL JOINT COMMISSION—STATEMENT BY MINISTER OF FISHERIES AND FORESTRY

Hon. Mitchell Sharp (Secretary of State for External Affairs): Mr. Speaker, I wish at this time to table in the