

Telesat Canada Act

• (3:00 p.m.)

I am sure the minister is well aware of the experience in the United States in respect of the satellite communications system there called Comsat. The U.S. government set up a 50-50 capital participation program between the carriers and the public with the government making no capital investment but having a minority number of directors on the board, a mere 3 out of 15. That experience has shown, as I am sure the minister will agree, that it has not been a successful operation and that no telecommunications system is likely to be successful when the control is in the hands of private bodies.

One is rather surprised that the minister, in view of the avant-garde approach he takes in respect of NATO and other current matters, would not have experimented with a Crown corporation in this field. When the hon. gentleman was the minister of revenue in Quebec he advocated full government control and ownership of Sidbec, a newly integrated Quebec steel operation. The minister suggested this would create something which did not exist in Quebec, namely, an integrated steel mill which would give a boost to and have a multiplier effect on the economy. If the minister could support the operation of a Crown corporation like Sidbec in Quebec on the basis of economic reasons justifying public control, surely a better and more convincing case can be made for a Crown corporation in this field where the objective is political and social rather than economic. In this case, underlying that objective is national unity and development across the country.

One may fear there will be little federal participation in this venture. The minister's recommendations will not allow any participation by provincial governments. We believe there should be the fullest federal and provincial participation with 51 per cent control in the hands of the federal government and 49 per cent held by the provincial governments. When one realizes the active steps the provincial government of Quebec has taken in entering into an agreement with France in respect of satellite communications, one would hope that the minister would take some initiative on the part of the federal and provincial governments to develop this important field of communications.

Yesterday the minister mentioned that this new corporation would develop a research program and he quoted from the particular clause in the bill which gives authority for research development. It is obvious that there

[Mr. Gilbert.]

is no government co-ordination of its scientific and technological programs and policies. Where will the satellite research program fit into the over-all objectives of science in Canada? This raises the question of why the intense neutron generator program was cancelled last fall, why the government expanded its oceanographic research program under the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources, and why the Queen Elizabeth telescope project in British Columbia was cancelled after millions of dollars had been spent. It is obvious that scientific research under this government is chaotic and that science policy is determined by accident rather than by plan. One would hope that the research program of this new corporation will be integrated with the National Research Council and other research bodies within the government so that we will have a total science policy rather than the haphazard approach taken so far by the government.

Yesterday I felt that the minister in his opening remarks in respect of the satellite communications system showed himself to be a true supporter of private enterprise and that his previous statement in respect of economics was mere words. He seemed to indicate that he had no intention of implementing his ideas. If he had had the spirit and the courage to meet this problem he would have thought seriously about setting up a Crown corporation whereby the federal and provincial governments would be given the right to participate in its development and in research so that all benefits flowing from the project would go to the Canadian people and be available for their use. He has chosen otherwise. He has chosen to give the private carriers and the public the right to invest in this program. With the investment of a mere \$60 million the government could have implemented this program for an experimental period to see what it would achieve, in light of the success with regard to Polymer and other government corporations. He has not elected to do so and I am sure he will regret the step he has taken. I hope that when we reach the committee stage he will give us his reasons for electing otherwise and that Dr. McIntosh and other expert witnesses will be called to justify this decision.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, perhaps I should rise on a point of order before my colleague resumes his seat. The reason for doing so will become clear in a moment. Yesterday my colleague the hon. member for Selkirk moved an amendment to the motion for second reading of this bill.