

AUDITOR GENERAL

TABLING OF ANNUAL REPORT FOR YEAR ENDED MARCH 31, 1977

Mr. Speaker: I have the honour to lay upon the Table the Annual Report of the Auditor General of Canada to the House of Commons for the fiscal year ended March 31, 1977.

May I remind hon. members that, pursuant to Standing Order 65(1)(q), this report is deemed permanently referred to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts.

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

[Translation]

FEDERAL-PROVINCIAL RELATIONS

DATE OF NEXT CONFERENCE OF FIRST MINISTERS

Mr. Joe Clark (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Prime Minister. I would like to ask him whether he intends to call soon a conference of first ministers and, if so, on what date?

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, it is a matter which I am now discussing with the premiers during my visit in each of the provinces. I have undertaken to see them all before announcing a date or even confirming that indeed there will be a conference and what will be the agenda for such conference.

SUGGESTED INCREASED PROVINCIAL POWERS OVER
CABLEVISION

Mr. Joe Clark (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, I should like to put a supplementary question. In view of the judgment delivered yesterday by the Supreme Court, if there is such a conference of first ministers, does the Prime Minister intend to take this opportunity to make concrete proposals to the provinces giving them more powers over cablevision?

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, at first sight this item on the agenda would seem far removed from the concerns of the premiers whom I met. To begin with, it would be an economic conference; we are all very concerned over the high rate of unemployment. We intend to prevent another upward thrust of inflation and it would essentially be the matter under consideration. I do not think it would be advisable to introduce the matter mentioned by the Leader of the Opposition. Moreover, he knows that we have already reached agreement with other provinces which would allow administrative arrangements or which would indicate the great flexibility of the federal government in the matter.

Mr. Clark: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Communications has suggested, I believe, a meeting of all ministers of communications to discuss matters of jurisdiction and administrative arrangements in the field of cable television generally.

Oral Questions

Can the Prime Minister confirm that such a meeting of ministers of communications will take place and can he say whether the government intends to make individual arrangements with each province or to take a common approach for all provinces?

Mr. Trudeau: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Communications has made the same proposals to all provinces with a view to greater administrative decentralization. Up to now, the province of Manitoba has given its approval to such arrangements. I believe that discussions are going on in Saskatchewan and Ontario. However, I cannot talk as yet about the attitude of other provinces. But, again, our proposals apply to all provinces and seek to solve the constitutional problem. Since the courts have now pronounced judgment on the constitutional problem, we are coming back to our former position which was to try and find flexible administrative arrangements. I simply wish to point out to the Leader of the Opposition that when we called such a conference about a year ago, the Quebec Minister of Communications had ostentiously announced that he would not attend.

INQUIRY AS TO THE GOVERNMENT'S INTENTIONS ABOUT
CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGES

Mr. Joe Clark (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, is it the government's position that there will not be constitutional change now in the area of communications, but only administrative changes? Is that the federal government's final position?

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): No, not at all, Mr. Speaker. I said to the Leader of the Opposition that the courts have decided on the constitution as it stands. But as far as constitutional changes are concerned, the Leader of the Opposition is well aware that I have indicated several times, from 1968 to 1971 and from 1975 to 1977, and again in recent statements, that we were ready to consider any constitutional changes necessary to provide the country with a better constitution.

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● (1417)

COMMUNICATIONS

POSSIBILITY OF NEGOTIATIONS WITH PROVINCES ON
JURISDICTION

Mr. Heward Graffey (Brome-Missisquoi): The Minister of Communications being absent, Mr. Speaker, I shall direct my question to the right hon. Prime Minister. Could he tell the House whether the government has changed its policy and become involved with all provinces in a real negotiation process and given up at the same time the bilateral approach it had maintained up to now in its dealings with the provinces in the area of communications?