

*Government Organization*

Democrat nor Creditiste. Nor for that matter is it a capitalist machine or a communist machine. No matter who designs it or where it is designed, a machine is a machine. How to grapple with the problems created by burgeoning technology, how to ensure that machines serve men and not the other way around, is, I suggest, a challenge that is going to thrust itself more and more into the forefront of our political consciousness and into national affairs.

I have made that excursion into, if you like, philosophy to indicate to hon. members that the Department of Communications will not become a two-dimensional institution concerned only with means and not with ends. We will be a highly technical department and highly science oriented, and must be if we are to execute our specific mandate. We will keep our place on the advancing frontiers of science wherever they may lead—to the second generation communications satellites, to laser pipes carrying great volumes of traffic—voice, data, visual—between major cities, to the possibility of three-dimensional television offered by the new science of holography.

Having said that, I want to make clear that while we will be scientific savants we will not be idiot savants obsessed with scientific problems and projects and unconcerned with their effects upon society, upon our politics, our culture, our social system.

• (2:40 p.m.)

*[Translation]*

The danger for any government institution, in fact for any institution, is that as time passes it does become composed of idiot savants, of individuals who are expert in their own field and rank amateurs at everything else. If we, in the Department of Communications, possess no clear-cut solutions to this familiar problem we are at least conscious of it. We intend to remain a small department—our payroll for 1969-70 is 1,339—and our mandate is not to operate new telecommunications systems such as the communication satellite but to bring them into being and to regulate them once in existence. If we will be small in quantity we will be high in quality. We will also recognize that quality is not enough. Communications is so complex, so fast-changing and so far-reaching a field that no group or institution could command adequate let alone comprehensive knowledge of every facet of the science. We will therefore, be an 'open' department, working as closely as possible with those in industry, in the universities and in governments here and

abroad. One technique of co-operation and consultation which we intend to employ will be that of consultative committees composed of the ablest specialists we can find in the various disciplines of communications who can feed into the department a broad spectrum of knowledge and experience, to generate ideas for us and to criticize our performance.

By this means we hope to arrive at some answers to some of the problems and challenges which confront us. But let me make it plain—far from as yet knowing all the answers we don't even as yet know all the questions.

I will give three examples of areas where questions, the right questions, will have to be asked, and soon. No branch of communications is expanding at a greater rate than that of information retrieval, sometimes known as the knowledge industry, by which computers provide information on real time in response to requests from distant access terminals.

Here are some of the questions that need to be formulated: should the acquisition and distribution of information be regulated? What knowledge should be sorted? Who should have access to it? What protection can be provided for the rights of personal privacy?

Another area to be investigated is that of the inter-relationship between communications and transportation. In its most sophisticated forms—such as video-phones and inter-city closed circuit conference television—communication competes with transportation; it does away with much of the need for travel. We will have to consider what effect the communication systems of the future, most significantly that of the wired city, will have upon our transportation systems within, and between, major cities. And finally, there is the apparent contradiction, which I have already mentioned, that while communication unites people, it can also isolate them. It was in this context that I recently threw out the idea of using our nationwide complex of post offices as locations for communication centers, perhaps by bulletin boards, perhaps by a system of hot-line telephones by which individual members of the public could communicate directly with their government.

In sum, Mr. Chairman, the Department of Communications faces a challenge the dimensions of which are impossible to define with any kind of satisfactory precision. The communications systems, such as the communications satellite system, which we will either