

*Oral Questions*

for the Acting Minister. Does the Acting Minister of Agriculture agree with the view that Canada's food producing capacity is threatened by a lack of research on the part of Agriculture Canada into the deterioration of our soil and water supplies?

**Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Transport):** Madam Speaker, I would point out to the Hon. Member that a number of initiatives have recently been taken to improve substantially the agricultural research initiatives in this country under the Special Recovery Program. A number of new agricultural research stations have been opened, particularly in western Canada with a hydrology lab. Other initiatives have been taken. I think what we can point out, and if the Minister of Agriculture were here I am sure he could elaborate on it, is that he, and his Department and the Government have been very much aware of that issue and have been responding to it by taking appropriate action.

**Mr. Greenaway:** Madam Speaker, it sounds to me as though the Minister disagrees. This is at variance with the latest chapter of "Fiscalamity" written by the Minister of State for Economic Development.

## CRITICISM OF DEPARTMENT

**Mr. Lorne Greenaway (Cariboo-Chilcotin):** Madam Speaker, does the Acting Minister agree with a document drafted by the Minister of State for Economic Development that states:

Agriculture Canada has been so preoccupied with Canagrex that it has failed to research vital problems such as the declining amount and quality of our farm land.

**Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Transport):** Madam Speaker, the document to which the Hon. Member refers is one on which we would not comment. What we can comment on are the actions that have been taken. I just pointed out this Government has taken several very important initiatives to upgrade and improve research and development, particularly with the establishment of the new hydrology station in Saskatoon in the Province of Saskatchewan.

**Mr. Crosbie:** Why doesn't Johnston know about it?

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## COMMUNICATIONS

## REGULATION OF HIGH TECHNOLOGY INDUSTRIES—CRITICISM OF DEPARTMENT

**Mr. Geoff Scott (Hamilton-Wentworth):** Madam Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Communications. Does he agree that the communications Department is subjecting high technology industries to a host of regulations which may be impeding their growth?

**Hon. Francis Fox (Minister of Communications):** Madam Speaker, may I first of all congratulate the Hon. Member on being able to read *Maclean's* magazine. He, like the two

previous questioners, has read *Maclean's* this morning, which I suppose is something to their credit. If the Hon. Member is referring to the communications industries, he knows as well as I do that there is one industrial sector in Canada that has a competitive edge in the international field and it is, indeed, the Canadian telecommunications industry. On the other hand we all know that with evolving technologies there is a need to reform certain regulatory aspects that affect not only the telecommunications industry but also the broadcasting industry. But if the Hon. Member is saying that we should at this stage of the game try to improve that regulatory process, I obviously agree.

**Mr. Scott (Hamilton-Wentworth):** Madam Speaker, I am delighted to know that the Minister of Communications can read *Maclean's* magazine as well.

## DOCUMENT SUBMITTED BY MINISTER OF STATE FOR SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

**Mr. Geoff Scott (Hamilton-Wentworth):** Madam Speaker, does the Minister of Communications agree with the document submitted by his colleague, the Minister of State for Science and Technology, the document that was submitted to Cabinet? Does he agree with the statements made by his cabinet colleague?

**Hon. Francis Fox (Minister of Communications):** Madam Speaker, quite obviously we, on this side of the House, feel there is always room for improvement, that there is always room to ensure that the regulatory environment is adjusted to changing times and conditions. If that is what the Hon. Member is asking me, then my colleague and I are indeed in agreement.

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## RAILWAYS

## COST OF UPGRADING RAIL NETWORK

**Mr. Les Benjamin (Regina West):** Madam Speaker, I have a question for the Minister of Transport. He will be aware of a telex that he received from the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool on September 21. It pointed out that his officials estimate in the order of \$1.6 billion will be required to upgrade all the rail line network now guaranteed to the year 2000, but that the announcement of February 1 by the Government of only \$1.072 billion means there is a shortfall of about \$528 million. Can the Minister advise the House what his reply was to the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool and all the other elevator companies that are making investment plans and do not know whether or not their branch lines will be retained?

**Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Transport):** Madam Speaker, I would answer by saying I do not think one should say "only \$1 billion." It seems to me that is an awful lot of money that is being allocated toward a major improvement of the branch line system in western Canada.