

Communications Satellites

should be a public utility in Canada, that it should operate to the advantage of communications systems in this country and play a useful role in sending messages to all parts of the world. In addition, this would enable Canada to stay in a prominent position in the communications field.

While it may have been necessary to bring in a consortium to provide the scientific knowledge, most Canadians were of the opinion that we had decided to go that particular program alone and were increasing the expertise we had already developed in this field. The Canadian public was aware of the fact that we are the second or third most interested country in this type of communication. We have a vast area geographically, and therefore need scientific knowledge of this sort.

When the Liberal government suggests that the publication put out by the Telesat Corporation was sufficient to provide information about the changes that have taken place in government thinking over the last several years, it seems to me that they have not read the pamphlet, since all it gives is the names of the board of directors and very little else. It does not say why we did the things we did. It does not say why we had to negotiate a contract with Hughes.

I had thought the argument had been resolved on the side of Canadian development, and I was given the impression the other night from a television program that we were building a plant at Shirleys Bay for the purpose. I stand to be corrected, but I think we are now building a plant in California, where the sun shines much longer than it does in Canada and where everything is done in a big way, and Hughes may make a big splash with this as he did with other projects over the years, much to the dismay of many shareholders in that corporation. However, I suggest that the government is obligated to give the information asked for in both motion No. 96 and motion No. 97. I think the Canadian public is entitled to know whether or not we have totally abandoned the building of telecommunications facilities of the kind we believed we were embarking upon.

The former Minister of Communications did admit a cost factor was involved, and this raised another problem. I suppose in the Liberal party there are two lines of thought. There are those who believe that Canadian development is worth while though it may cost something; there are others who believe it is better to give the money to the United States and buy technology. Perhaps we will now give the money to the Russians since they seem to be doing pretty well, too, in certain fields. Or perhaps we should shop around in Eaton's and Simpsons'.

• (5:40 p.m.)

I think there are many people in this country who agree with the former Minister of Communications who said, in effect, "So what?"—because there is a change. We spent a lot of money developing much useless scientific knowledge in this country, and here is a place in which we have established some expertise and have decided we can build a communications facility which can be used not only by Canada but by other countries, and to which we can add in order to do the things which will be necessary to make a contribution in the communications field which we are unable to do in other fields. I presume the same difficulty exists in the Conservative party, because as I understand

[Mr. Peters.]

the hon. member for Hillsborough (Mr. Macquarrie)—and I am always very interested in listening to his speeches because he seems to be taking a new line in the Conservative party—

Mr. Dinsdale: It is Progressive Conservative.

Mr. Peters: He may be the progressive in that party, progressing to a new position in the political spectrum. But he seems to be saying in a very progressive way that we should take the money and buy it as cheaply as possible, and what is wrong with buying it from the United States? The hon. member for Brandon-Souris is a little more old-fashioned and says there might be some merit in keeping it in Canada. I should like to see these papers so we could look at the developments that have been made.

Mr. Dinsdale: We started this in 1962.

Mr. Peters: That proves the point. A real Conservative never lets go of something. The year 1962 seems to have become a fixation. The hon. member for Hillsborough, however, is really talking about something happening right now, and I am particularly interested in something which will happen in the future. I believe most Canadians are interested in the development of expertise in certain fields. We have made some bad mistakes in this country. We have made them in the aircraft industry. We developed probably the best team of scientific experts in the aeronautical field in Canada and then, through government intervention and lack of foresight among other things—this is history—we scrapped the project and lost these scientists.

This cost us a lot of money. In my opinion we had the largest expenditure in that field and only had to find out what we would do with the baby. We had to make up our minds whether we had a bomber, a fighter aircraft, a trooper or what. However, we scrapped it. It seems to me this is what we are doing in respect of the expertise we have developed in the telecommunications field. I was interested in the fact that Northern Electric is involved in this development. Northern Electric, as you know, Mr. Speaker, is a subsidiary of Bell Canada, which is another public utility. Bell Canada is before us now, wanting more money.

I should like to learn from these papers just what Northern Electric is doing. It is interesting to note that Northern Electric has started to lay off a number of people and close down its wire and hardware division. It has laid off people in my area and has closed down in Ontario, I am told, something like 16 outlets. It has laid off a large number of employees who have been with the company for a long time. It does not appear to be too interested in an aggressive sales program. I am wondering how that company fits in with the Telesat program and with other developments in this field.

I should like to see these documents. Also, I should like to see them published so that the news media could see them and perhaps do some research into the question of why we became involved with Hughes Aircraft Company in the United States. I was of the opinion, as I believe most people in the country were, that we had decided this was a field of prime importance to Canada because of the need for television in the Arctic and in remote and inaccessible