

Government Organization

him has expired. Does the house agree to let him finish his speech?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chairman: Is it agreed? Agreed.

[*English*]

Mr. Kierans: A vital first step will be an international agreement on the use of frequencies, and this will be dealt with by the World Administrative Radio Conference scheduled for late 1970 or early 1971. I will keep hon. members closely informed of developments because I know they will be keenly interested, both from the standpoint of the implications of such technology upon national sovereignty and from that of the far-reaching implications for developing countries of such a low-cost system of television.

Finally, among projects under way I want to describe one that is, considered over the long term, unquestionably of special importance. Telecommunications legislation and regulation as it now exists is, to a considerable degree, unco-ordinated and in certain areas inadequate. Much of this existing legislation developed as a by-product of transportation considerations, as can be seen by the titles of the relevant acts—the Railway Act, the Telegraphs Act, the Canada Shipping Act.

In March, 1968, the government's white paper on the satellite communications system drew attention to the increasing need for comprehensive telecommunications legislation and regulation to cover telecommunications services, both satellite and terrestrial. With the transfer of responsibility for telecommunications from the Minister of Transport to the Postmaster General, earlier studies have been continued and much preliminary work has been done.

We now intend to move one major step further. As the basis for a complete overhaul of telecommunications legislation and regulation, and coincident with the approval by Parliament of a new Department of Communications, I will set up a special task force to collect comprehensive information on the national communication industry, to study present and future communication needs both of the public and of the industry, whether carriers or users, and to draw up recommendations for a national communications policy and plan. This task force, a sort of telecommunication, will be chaired by the deputy minister of communications. Its membership will be drawn from the department itself and other government departments and agencies. In

[The Deputy Chairman.]

addition, the telecommission group will work closely with, and request information and advice from, industry, universities and other governments. In addition to in-house studies, research contracts will be placed with outside experts. The report of the telecommission is intended to be completed by the end of 1970.

That concludes my summary of what the department is and of what it is doing. I will conclude by attempting to describe the kind of department we intend to become.

Communications is the nerve system of our society. No field of science, with the possible exception of space technology, is changing at as fast a rate, and no field of science, with the possible exception of genetics, contains within it greater implications, good or bad, for society and for the individual.

The Department of Communications, as I have said, will concern itself with the medium, not with the message. But the two cannot be separated. Without accepting uncritically the dictum that the medium is the message, it is obvious that the former affects the latter and that any message is altered and conditioned by the medium through which it is communicated. Television has had a galvanic effect upon our society, irrespective of whether its content has been good or bad, entertaining or dull. Those effects have not always been predictable. Television, on the one hand, expands our horizons by bringing an image of the whole world right into our living rooms; on the other hand, it contracts our horizons by reducing the opportunity and need for personal conversations and relationships. And, specifically, television has robbed parents of part of the responsibility and joy of passing on their stored wisdom to their children. Telephones have had the same schizophrenic effect. On the one hand, they unite people who are living or working at a distance from one another; on the other, they make it less necessary for people to go out to meet each other in person.

Communications constitutes the most important single element in the technological revolution that has overtaken us and which is carrying us along—willingly or unwillingly is virtually irrelevant—toward a kind of society which we can as yet only dimly perceive. As politicians hon. members will be aware, perhaps uncomfortably so, of the extent to which technology is altering our political system, and specifically of the extent to which technology is draining the ideological content, the traditional ideological content, from our political wars. A machine is non-political, neither Liberal nor Conservative nor New