

Communications Satellites

successful satellites which are still in orbit; that we happen to be No. 3 in terms of functioning satellites still orbiting. Nevertheless, there has been no attempt made by the government to reveal in any detail even the financial picture which persuaded it to completely change its concept of a 100 per cent Canadian communications satellite.

It boils down to this. Government policy in this field, as in others, has been confusing because of its meandering from one position to another. The same criticism could be made with respect to other areas of the government's activities. For example, we are presently debating a government bill proposing tax reform. It has gone from complexity to complexity and from confusion to confusion until the whole of the Canadian economy finds a pall of uncertainty hanging over it. I know that in the field of satellite technology, Canadian firms such as R.C.A., Northern Electric and Spar Aerospace feel they are competent to move into this area. I appeal to the government, not only on behalf of opposition members but for the sake of its own backbenchers as well, to table the document which has been requested and which has been withheld.

I believe that having regard to the leaky condition of the ship of state at the moment we shall get the documents anyway. But let us do this in the regular way, not by the back door method. Evidently there are those in the civil service who are becoming disenchanted with the government's disposition to keep all these matters away from the public. The government should move to restore our faith, and it can only do so by showing less readiness to resort to a cloak of secrecy and taking Members of Parliament into its confidence.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Charles Turner (London East): Mr. Speaker, the motion of the hon. member for the production of the contract signed between Telesat Canada and the Hughes Aircraft Company for the construction of Telesat Canada's domestic communications satellites must be opposed for the reasons set out in the Telesat Canada Act of 1969. The act clearly establishes that Telesat Canada is not an agent of Her Majesty or a Crown corporation within the meaning of the Financial Administration Act. Rather, it is an independently operating commercial corporation which only reports to government respecting certain matters delineated in the Telesat Canada Act. The powers of the company are spelled out in section 6 of that act.

• (5:30 p.m.)

On several occasions in statements to this House and in answers to questions, the Minister of Communications (Mr. Stanbury) has stressed that as a result of the commercial nature of the company it would not be in the interests and objects of the company to have information of a private and confidential nature made public. In short, then, Telesat Canada is a private company subject to certain limited powers possessed by the Minister of Communications or the government as laid down in the Telesat Canada Act. Essentially it is a common carrier which is subject to certain government regulations in the same way that the other, old common carriers are.

Telesat is a limited company in which the government is a major but not controlling shareholder and in which

other shareholders also have rights. Aside, therefore, from certain corporate actions specified in the Telesat Canada Act in which either the Minister of Communications or the Governor in Council must concur, the management of the company is responsible to shareholders in the company. Given this private, commercial nature it is particularly important that Telesat's right to privacy in its negotiations with members of the communications industry be preserved.

Telesat's contract with the Hughes Aircraft Company is a complex commercial and technical document dealing with the most advanced technological equipment. Some of the confidential information included in it is the property of the Hughes Aircraft Company, which almost certainly, and quite understandably, would regard its public disclosure by Telesat Canada as a breach of faith.

Since the hon. member's motion for the production of the Telesat-Hughes contract and other documents was made, the company's 1970 annual report has been tabled in this House as provided by the Telesat Canada Act. It contains up to date information on the financial and program activities of the company as required by the Canada Corporations Act and the Telesat Canada Act. In July of this year a semi-annual report was distributed to shareholders of record in the company. I am further advised that the company, like any other Canadian commercial corporation, will respond to any private inquiries for additional information in connection with its program.

For the above reasons I cannot support the motion at this time and suggest the hon. member should contact the president of Telesat for the information he desires.

Mr. Dinsdale: Would the hon. member who has just spoken accept a question? He made the point that it would not be possible to reveal information because of the involvement of private companies. Is he aware that the Trans-Canada Telephone System and the CN-CP Telecommunications system offered to build a Canadian communications satellite without any public involvement at all, and had it not been for government insistence we would have had our domestic satellite communications system?

Mr. Arnold Peters (Timiskaming): Mr. Speaker, this is another opportunity for members to point out to the government their resentment at the retention of information in a field of general interest if not of general advantage. The hon. member for Brandon-Souris (Mr. Dinsdale) referred to the technology we have developed in Canada, of which all Canadians are duly proud—the Alouette satellite, which was not a highly secretive program. I understand that some of the so-called scientists took parts of it home and worked on it in the basement, that they did not have proper insulating materials and used the fibretype coffee cup. Then they talked the United States into putting this mass of coffee cups in the air, and the satellite is still up there working very satisfactorily, probably much to the chagrin of every other scientific body in the world.

Liberal governments have a habit of not allowing information to be made public. I am not familiar with what is in these particular papers or with the background outlined by previous speakers, but I do know that many Canadians are of the opinion that the Telesat operation