

● (10:50 p.m.)

[English]

BROADCASTING—FOWLER COMMISSION—
ACCEPTANCE OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Mr. Robert C. Coates (Cumberland): Mr. Speaker, on Monday I posed the following question to the Prime Minister:

Can the Prime Minister inform the house when the cabinet committee studying the Fowler report will be in a position to indicate which of the recommendations of that committee will be accepted by the government?

Mr. Speaker found difficulty in determining the urgency of this question, and as a result I wish to enlarge on the reason it was asked.

In 1964 the Fowler Committee was set up by the present government, and it reported on September 9, 1965. On receipt of the report the Prime Minister informed the house that a special cabinet committee, headed by himself, would study the report. The expected result was that legislation would be proposed.

During the period the Fowler Committee sat we were informed that a freeze would be applied to those aspects of broadcasting under consideration by the committee. We were later informed that the freeze in effect during the committee hearings would continue during the period the report was under consideration by the cabinet committee.

I have been personally concerned in this whole matter because the action of this government has prevented my constituents from receiving the alternate television service they desire from the C.T.V. network through CJCH-T.V. Halifax. Many other hon. members have found themselves in a similar position. I point to the hon. member for Pictou (Mr. MacEwan), who has questioned the government on the same problem. Now, we hear that the Board of Broadcast Governors has heard and ruled on the application of the 11 member stations of the C.T.V. network to take over this network, a procedure opposed in the recommendation of the Fowler Committee but approved of very recently by the Board of Broadcast Governors. I think the recommendation of the Fowler Committee was to the effect that such approval should not be given.

We are also informed that the Board of Broadcast Governors will hear the application of Ralph Snelgrove Limited regarding the shifting of channel 3 from Barrie to Toronto. Surely, it is the height of stupidity to which only this government can aspire, to have under consideration by a cabinet committee recommendations which the Board of Broadcast Governors is presently ignoring in

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the broadcasting field. This has led the *Globe and Mail* to editorialize in the following manner, and rightly so on Monday, March 7, 1966:

The public is left to wonder. In permitting the B.B.C. to defy this one important Fowler recommendation, is the Government saying that it also rejects the recommendation but is still weighing other recommendations, or that, in fact, it rejects the whole report? And if either or neither is true, surely the people are entitled to be told the Government's reasons for taking (or not taking) a stand.

But perhaps such public wondering is purposeless. In the accident-strewn history of this Government, perhaps we have just witnessed another accident.

[Translation]

Mr. Albert Béchard (Parliamentary Secretary to Secretary of State): Mr. Speaker, the report of the broadcasting commission, commonly known as the Fowler report, was submitted to the government early last September and, as all members know, certain events took place last fall which affected not only the government but all members, and prevented the government from giving serious consideration to that report in the latter part of 1965.

In addition to the said report, the government also obtained the views of the C.B.C., of the Canadian Broadcasters Association and of several groups of persons concerned.

In early January, a special cabinet committee, headed by the Prime Minister (Mr. Pearson) himself, was set up with a view to studying the Fowler report.

I believe that the government has begun serious consideration of the Fowler report. For some time, the government has been doing a vast amount of work, in addition to absorbing a report of this size as well as all the representations made by C.B.C. officials and other groups. Obviously, some time is required.

In addition, it was emphasized in the house several times by the Prime Minister and by the Secretary of State (Miss LaMarsh) that broadcasting was a most complex and most important problem and that decisions could not be taken lightly.

Several problems are involved, as is well known: programming, service expansion to areas not yet supplied with television, consolidation of services in Montreal and Toronto, financing of the C.B.C. and many others still.