

Broadcasting

stations which the people in the south have, and because of the small number of people living there, very complicated and expensive cable systems and other systems used in southern Canada are not justified. In remote areas in the north the problem which exists in construction and exploration camps in this day and age is that it is very difficult to get people to work there unless you can promise them some of the amenities which they are used to here in the south. There is a growing awareness in these remote communities, mainly because originally the government provided the CBC service to them, that alternatives to the CBC are now available. I am sometimes surprised by the mail I get from very small, remote communities asking me what I can do to help in providing programming additional to that provided by the CBC. These people have also approached government departments, such as the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development. I understand that on several occasions that department has made money available for the establishment of satellite receiving stations which, in fact, may be operating illegally. However, I will not comment on that any further.

One of the reasons people want programming additional to that provided by the CBC is that the corporation puts forward a certain point of view, a certain philosophy, and people would like to hear the other side of the story. We have heard accusations in this House from the NDP that the CBC has been an instrument of the Liberal party, and vice versa. The other day someone suggested that perhaps it is controlled by the Rhinoceros party.

An hon. Member: The Conservative party.

Mr. Nickerson: Most people would agree that there is a CBC point of view and that if alternatives were available, other concepts of what is going on in the country could be made known to people.

Apart from that, what many people in smaller communities want is entertainment. Very often the CBC concentrates on lecturing people, telling them what to think rather than entertaining them. I have referred to this several times in this House in the question period and in motions under Standing Order 43. To a certain extent the government has been responsive, although progress has been very slow.

One of the difficulties faced by small isolated northern communities is that they know that satellite receiving stations are available and they would like to put them into operation, as very often they do. But there is always the threat of illegality hanging over them. What we are doing by failing to bring the laws of the country up to date as far as technology is concerned, is forcing people to act illegally. The hon. member for Prince George-Peace River (Mr. Oberle) tells a very interesting story. A few weeks ago he was part of an erection team constructing a receiving station. An agent of the Solicitor General happened upon the scene. Although he did not threaten to stop the crew, because, presumably, he would benefit from having that station, he inquired whether or not they were acting in accordance with the law, to which the hon. member for Prince George-Peace River replied "I do not really know,

but I am certainly acting in accordance with the wishes of my constituents." The method of making this service available to communities in the north—aside from the camps to which I referred, where the services are operated by the company which owns the camp—is to form some communal organization usually through service clubs or sometimes by municipal organizations, the municipal council or some subsidiary organization set up by the municipality. If the Minister of Communications (Mr. Fox) or the Solicitor General (Mr. Kaplan) were to move in and try to tear down those satellite receiving stations or prosecute the people who provided this service, they might find themselves in the position of taking the mayor of the local community to court and perhaps dragging the entire municipal council to court with him. There would be a great public outcry because these stations are what the local people want and they are set up in accordance with the wishes of the people. I would not like to see the Minister of Communications acting with a heavy hand, as he has threatened to do on occasions, and then having to draw back afterwards.

One criticism of the way in which the department is operating is that it is creating a double standard. The department has moved in rather heavily against stations and receivers owned by private companies. It is always easy to take on a private company; it is a lot harder to take on a public organization. They have chosen the easy way and left out municipalities and publicly-owned receiving stations, thereby creating a double standard which I think is morally wrong.

I have been presenting the positive aspects of the case in favour of the satellite stations, but I have to admit that certain things which the parliamentary secretary said are quite valid. There is a negative side to the argument. The parliamentary secretary mentioned such things as copyright, Canadian content and rebroadcasting difficulties. If you have two stations rebroadcasting on a similar frequency, one picture might impinge upon the other. That is a matter which must be resolved. Also I have had complaints about material being received over the airwaves which is not in keeping with generally accepted Canadian moral standards. There again, I have heard from people who very much like to see shows which are not in keeping with normally accepted Canadian moral standards. So, there is a pro and a con argument to that as well.

● (1650)

I admit there are difficulties and that this matter should be looked at, not only from the strictly technical point of view within the Department of Communications, but as the hon. member suggested, in the House or in committees of the House where it can be debated and I look forward to that opportunity.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Ralph Ferguson (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of State, Small Businesses): Mr. Speaker, I rise to address the motion of the hon. member for Skeena (Mr. Fulton) which relates to the report of the Therrien committee submitted to the CRTC on July 24, 1980. The report contains a number of