

in the Minister's response deal with the CBC Budget. That was not in our report. We might want to deal with the CBC Budget at a later date, but that was not part of it.

• (1530)

This is a very meagre four and a half pages. As well as not dealing with what it should be dealing with, it raises completely extraneous matters. The report has been padded to get to four and a half pages and made to look like it is addressing issues, in fact it is dealing with subjects that are not at issue right now, that are certainly not the business of the committee at the present time. They would take the committee off on a completely different tact.

This is an important subject, Mr. Speaker. The whole idea of parliamentary reform, committee reform and the idea of having the Government respond is to make meaningful the work of committees. We are not working in isolation to come up with reports that gather dust. The idea is that the committee's work would have relevance, and that the Government would study them.

We have a task force set up by the Government. We looked at that. We had hearings. We commissioned research. We came up with a report and the Government is supposed to carry on to the next step. It intended to, but now we have this complete about face. The Government does not want us to continue the work that way. It wants us to retract on certain suggestions. The Government wants us to investigate the CBC, the NFB or do other things that we were never asked to do, certainly not in connection with this order of reference. We have been left without any guidance whatsoever. Our time has been wasted and house time has been wasted.

In conclusion I would suggest that no doubt Standing Order 99 anticipates and requires the Government to make some sense of our work, to come back in a reasoned way with its response in order that the legislative process can proceed in a proper fashion and that people can work together in some kind of reasonable way. This is not what we have today.

We have a Minister who will intervene in particular cases, but is failing to give policy direction. These are extremely important matters, matters before the CRTC right now in which decisions will be made without any government input whatsoever. We very much regret this order of doing things. It is upside down. The Government should be giving policy direction at this stage before it is too late and not intervening in the process later, which is how this Minister wants to operate. This is a fundamental infringement of the process anticipated with these parliamentary committee reforms.

Hon. Flora MacDonald (Minister of Communications): Mr. Speaker, may I say that I am pleased to see the Hon. Member for Mount Royal (Mrs. Finestone) in the House. She will know that I telephoned her the other day to commiserate with her on her recent accident. I am glad she is mobile and able to join us today.

Point of Order—Mrs. Finestone

I want to say at the outset that members of the committee have, indeed, worked hard and produced a number of reports, many of which I have already responded to, including reports on the status of artists, museums, CBC accountability et cetera. I want to deal today with comments that have been made about the fifth and sixth reports of the Standing Committee on Communications and Culture and the point raised that the Government's response has not been as comprehensive as it should be.

It is the Government's opinion that the response tabled at this time is as comprehensive as it can be under the circumstances and I would like to deal with those circumstances because some very good points have been raised.

The report submitted by the committee dealt with the legislative aspects of the report of the task force on broadcasting policy, namely, the Caplan-Sauvageau report. Now the Committee is studying, as I understand it, other aspects of the task force report, particularly certain policy aspects.

I have to admit, as was raised here earlier today, that this sequence was at my instigation. I believed at the time the reference was made that it would be feasible to begin drafting legislation before all the policy aspects had been studied and dealt with. But as I looked at the report of the committee, as I followed its work during the months of May and June, and as I studied the reports throughout the summer, it became very clear to me that it would not be possible to proceed in that manner. In fact, I think it was as a result of some of the committee hearings across the country when other issues began being raised that I realized there were certain fundamental policy issues that had not been met or discussed that would have to be dealt with before legislation could be drafted and before a new broadcasting act could be brought in. In other words, the comprehensive policy matters had to be studied, examined and dealt with before the whole Broadcasting Act could be determined in its final stages.

The hearings, I think, pointed to the fact that the task force report itself was rooted in certain assumptions. Those assumptions are such that I feel obliged to question them. Let me give you an example, Mr. Speaker. The first of these assumptions is that regulation, as we presently know it, will be more effective in getting private broadcasters to carry their weight with respect to Canadian programming, and the one way to do that would be to make regulation tougher. I have read a great deal in the last number of months about the impact of regulation on the private broadcasters; there have been many articles and letters written on this subject. I can cite, for instance, Robert Fulford, who has analyzed this matter very carefully and who points out that even with the kind of regulatory methods that are now in effect we have not had the kind of Canadian programming that we all desire.

I have questioned whether or not regulation is the only approach to the private broadcasting system. I have raised the question whether or not methods or incentives could be used, or a combination of incentives or regulations which would