

Broadcasting

Right now it is looking at an area which is under the most severe attack as a result of foreign domination. The hon. member's party has consistently made this a plank in its platform for many years. We have a Canadian cultural industry, which is dependent on communications, under severe attack by the internationalization of geostationary satellites which anyone can use by buying an appropriate receiver to stick up on his roof. It is not very big, only a metre and a half across, and it can receive signals directly from abroad, for which the person does not pay, even though someone was responsible for the material directed to that satellite.

I wish to direct my following remarks to a number of the recommendations related to the availability of satellite and earth station facilities to provide for the extension of services reflected in the report. In my opinion, and in the opinion of most members of the committee, it is in this satellite technology that the future of northern broadcasting lies. At this stage it would be appropriate to outline what positive steps have been and are being taken by this government, especially with respect to satellites, which also must include the associated earth stations. Last weekend, the communications minister announced changes in the federal government's policy and procedures with regard to licensing satellite television receive-only, commonly called TVRO, earth stations for the reception of television and radio programming from Canadian satellites. This new policy and procedure will be of benefit in several ways.

First, it allows for simplified application procedures which will make it possible for broadcasters to obtain TVRO licences within 90 days. Second, it makes Canadian satellite-delivered programming more readily available to Canadians throughout broadcast undertakings. Third, it permits provincial agencies and authorities to own and operate earth stations to receive Canadian-originated educational television and other signals from Canadian satellites. The previous policy, in effect since February, 1979, had restricted licences to broadcasters, common carriers and cable television operators. Fourth, licensed TVRO earth terminals are now permitted to receive radio program signals transmitted over the same satellite channel as the television signal. This change will facilitate the wider distribution of radio programs to remote communities at minimum cost and follows upon recommendation No. 21 of the CRTC committee's report.

The minister also announced that he is opening a more general review of the satellite earth station policy, including the study of the possibility of extending TVRO licensing to certain categories of applicants not now eligible. Recommendation No. 11 of the report states, and I quote:

A review should be undertaken, in consultation with all parties concerned, with a view to expanding the present policy governing the ownership and operation of earth stations for broadcasting purposes that would permit:

General and special-purpose broadcasting undertakings to own and operate uplink earth station; The ownership and operation of radio receive-only earth stations by licensed broadcasting undertakings; and

The ownership and operation of receive-only earth stations by educational and other non-commercial institutions for internal use; by community groups; and by private citizens for exclusive use by them and their households. I submit

that this recommendation is covered in large part by this recently announced policy and the general review to be undertaken shortly.

● (1630)

Early last week the Minister of Communications (Mr. Fox) announced the extension of the experimental program on the Anik B satellite. This program is one of ongoing operational research conducted by the Department of Communications.

The technical expertise and operational experience gained from this extended experimental program in the 14/12 gigahertz band will reflect the concern of the committee, as expressed in recommendation No. 8, that broadcast system planning should be flexible to accommodate advances in technology.

For the information of hon. members I would like to explain that I am a layman reading this very technical material. What are known as geostationary satellites are satellites effectively going around the world at the same speed as the earth turns and staying in the same spot. I believe this technology was invented in Canada. Step two of this, of course, is the kind of satellite which is used. The original satellites were of such a nature, without becoming too technical, that they would beam down at a receiver which had to be in a rural area because it tended to interfere with other communications because of the band it was using. I think it was a 6/4 gigahertz band, but I am not certain. The new technology which is just being developed, also in Canada, uses the 14/12 gigahertz band, which again in layman's language means that instead of having to be beamed down into a rural area and then brought by a cable into an urban area or wherever it is to be received, the signal can be beamed much closer. I am not sure if it can actually be put on a person's roof, but it can be brought quite close to it because it does not interfere with other signals. All this is very new and rapidly advancing.

I think the hon. member made a point with regard to how difficult it is for the government and governmental organizations to keep up with the tremendous expansion in this technology. However, that does not mean we should stop trying. We should keep trying. I am sure we have always done that in Canada with respect to this type of development, and I believe the government will develop policies which will be able to handle this kind of technology and protect the Canadian interest, which is our purpose.

Recommendation No. 9 refers to the planning of future Canadian satellites and urges full consultation with the broadcasting industry to ensure that the broadcasting needs of all Canadians are fully taken into account. These ongoing experimental projects are exploring ways by which the latest technological advances can be used for new and improved communications services in general.

However, more specifically, CBC, OECA and the private broadcast industry have been consulted and, indeed, are active participants in the Anik B experimental program. Educational television signals, OECA, are being beamed to locations in northern Ontario. In addition, CBC and BCTV signals are being beamed to northern British Columbia communities.