

*Government Orders*

The following approach should be taken. First, to avoid disruption the act should make provisions for those foreign channels now carried to continue to be operated. In other words, grandfather what exists and that is it. Second, the test in the future of whether to permit the importation of any additional foreign service should be that it actually adds something significant to the mix of programming available to Canadians. Specifically the test should offer programming complementary to that already available from licensed Canadian program broadcasters. The ultimate effect is not to dilute the Canadian service.

There is no provision for non-simultaneous substitution, something I have discussed in the past and something I will come back to again. I do not think it is fair the way we expect our Canadian networks to purchase rights and then once they have those rights to be able to attract large advertising dollars. How can broadcasters expect to obtain the advertising revenue when they are not able to attain the total rights to those programs?

The status is unclear for MATV systems. I remind the minister that the previous minister had to stand up and make a million excuses and explanations as to what the circumstances were and in what state MATV systems would be found. Condominium and apartment residents have a right to know where they stand regarding the law. If they have access to a master antenna or to a satellite, are they required to be licensed? Do they pay a telecommunication tax? Do they pay retransmission rights? Under this bill there is no clarity as to whether MATV systems will be considered a distribution undertaking and subject to licensing by the CRTC.

If they are exempt, then let us say they are exempt. According to the former Minister of Communications they were exempt. Why not make that clear in the law? Liberals have argued that condominium and apartment residents have a right to know where they stand.

The last issue I would like to look at is that of the cabinet power of direction and review. The way this bill is written it will seriously jeopardize the CRTC's ability to carry out its role as an expert and independent quasi-judicial body because it will grant to the cabinet two powers: first, to provide policy direction to the CRTC and, second, to review CRTC decisions.

Through these powers the cabinet would have sufficient control to effectively supersede the commission, a method by which to have one's cake and eat it too. We have argued that the cabinet should be empowered to issue binding directions to the CRTC, but these directions should be restricted to broad policy matters in furtherance of the objectives of the Broadcasting Act. Furthermore, the direction should refer to the specific objectives in the act which they seek to further. As well, we believe that such cabinet directions should not have a retroactive effect and should not be issued in respect of a particular licence. Regarding the cabinet's power to review the CRTC decisions, we argue that it must be limited. We support the standing committee's view that the power of review be limited to two situations. First, where the cabinet determines that its direction has been ignored or misinterpreted by the CRTC; and, second, when a decision of the CRTC has national policy implications regarding the broadcast system.

• (1400)

At the end, if I have time, I am going to read into the record Mr. Spicer's very astute observations in this regard. I had forgotten that I wanted to mention that I am not particularly pleased with the seven-year term being turned into a five-year term. I think that what happens to the nominees of both the board of the directors of the CBC and the CRTC is that we end up of having the perception of arms length and independence being distorted.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Speaker, it is comforting to find that this time, unlike its approach to VIA Rail and other elements of our national infrastructure, the Government has not dismantled our broadcasting system. It shows that, even in this Government, a Minister can, if he wants to, protect our heritage and refuse to let economic forces undermine the foundations of our society.

Obviously, this Bill is not perfect and I urge the Minister of Communications to consider very seriously my previous comments. He must recognize that my approach is positive, constructive and, I hope, Canadian rather than partisan.

Like thousands of Canadians, I am concerned about our country's future. Every time I turn on the television and every time I go to a bookstore or a newsstand, that mass invasion of programs, books, music and magazines