

Oral Questions

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. I let the hon. member for Yukon get away with one statement by way of a question. I do not think I can let him get away with two.

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COMMUNICATIONS**CABINET ACCEPTANCE OF TELESAT MERGER—ABILITY OF CABINET TO DEFINE PUBLIC INTEREST**

Mr. J. P. Nowlan (Annapolis Valley): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of Communications, and it refers to the cabinet decision of Thursday rejecting the CRTC decision of August 24 which was against the merger of TCTS and Telesat because the CRTC felt it was against the public interest. Since the minister herself on November 23, 1976 in a letter to the President of Telesat said that the CRTC had jurisdiction in this matter and since the CRTC found against a merger on broad issues of public interest as reported in its decision, I would like to ask the minister, in view of the decision of the cabinet, if she is prepared to tell the House that the cabinet, behind closed doors, is in a better position to define public interest than the independent regulatory authority created by parliament to do just that in an open public forum?

Hon. Jeanne Sauvé (Minister of Communications): Mr. Speaker, the reason for varying the decision of the CRTC was that the government had to refer to broader concerns of the government, that is, to ensure that Canadians would get the services which can be provided by this new technology in the north as in the south and at as reasonable a cost as possible. The prerogative of the CRTC remains, and it is in no way superseded by the agreement which will come to pass between Telesat and TCTS. If the hon. member would read the order in council precisely, he would note that it serves notice to both parties of the environment within which this agreement can occur, and that is to ensure and to say emphatically that in no way are the powers of the CRTC with regard to its responsibility to decide on the rate of return or the conditions under which someone can have access to the system to be superseded by anything that is in that agreement, just as my own powers under the Radio Act to look into matters such as ownership of earth stations are not superseded.

● (1432)

EFFECT OF MERGER OF TELESAT ON PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN OPERATION

Mr. J. P. Nowlan (Annapolis Valley): Mr. Speaker, I should like to direct my next question to that part of the minister's answer on public policy, as distinct from public interest. We will not get into a debate on how public interest is served. A public policy for Canada's participation in telecommunications was defined in the white paper on communications filed by one of the former ministers in this House in March 1968, which was the basis for the Telesat legislation. As set out in *Hansard* in 1969 that debate and policy dictated that the Canadian

[Mr. Nielsen.]

government was to have an independent regulatory authority in telecommunications with public participation and not a minority of telephone companies. Since that was rejected, can the minister tell the House what factors have changed to allow now, in effect, a de facto telephone company monopoly of telecommunications, an effective amendment of Telesat and an elimination or a reduction of any hope of public participation in the Telesat operation?

[Translation]

Hon. Jeanne Sauvé (Minister of Communications): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member confuses too many things. CRTC is still existing and has to assume certain responsibilities under the law, which I have just reaffirmed and which were reaffirmed in the order in council amending the CRTC's decision. The general interest of the government was to preserve the right of Canadians to an effective telecommunication system which will become entirely effective the day when the land and spatial systems are fully integrated. It is not a matter of monopoly, Mr. Speaker. Telesat has never been designed to compete with the telecommunication industries; on the contrary, it is a complement to those industries. The agreement concluded between those two parties precisely confirms that such an integration will now be possible. As for the more general government policies involved in that agreement, it is my duty to preserve them. Hon. members have been referring since last week to ministerial responsibility. Such responsibility has been exercised in the case of the agreement between Telesat and the TCTS. The prerogatives of the CRTC and the general policies of the government have been maintained under the order in council.

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[English]

ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS**EXTENSION OF TIME FOR THOMPSON INQUIRY—REQUEST MINISTER CONSULT WITH REPRESENTATIVES OF FISHERMEN**

Mr. John A. Fraser (Vancouver South): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of State (Environment). Can the hon. minister tell this House whether the government is going to extend the time necessary to allow the Thompson inquiry into tanker superports on the west coast to hear all of the evidence of all the intervenors, keeping in mind that under the present terms of reference the hearings were to have been completed by the end of December and clearly they cannot be under the present schedule?

Hon. Len Marchand (Minister of State (Environment)): Mr. Speaker, I and the other ministers involved in this particular inquiry will be meeting with Mr. Thompson tomorrow night, and this particular matter will be discussed then.

Mr. Fraser: Mr. Speaker, in view of the fact that the president and other members of the fishermen's union are here in Ottawa seeking an audience with the members of the cabinet on this particular matter, can we have the assurance of the hon. Minister that every effort will be made to give an