

Government Orders

I think tangentially that this bill recognizes that a very significant portion of the Canadian broadcasting industry, the private broadcasting industry, including its cable component, has come of age and is pulling its weight with reference to a commitment to Canada. Time after time, with the cudgel behind the back, the regulator has been able to encourage through various creative suggestions private broadcasters to make a contribution to Canada.

I should add that many of these private broadcasters have spontaneously—and I think the hon. member for Winnipeg St. James can acknowledge this—made contributions to the Canadian broadcasting system, including some significant contributions made by broadcasters based in his own home city.

I feel that the letter, for example, which the hon. member for Mount Royal had published in *The Toronto Star* on May 17 on the opinions page, may have—

Mrs. Finestone: You've read it.

Mr. Edwards: Yes, I did and I responded to it, incidentally, Mr. Speaker, but I got a bizarre response from the editor of *The Toronto Star* who said, "Although your article has merit, it is not appropriate for our Op-Ed page at this time. We receive a great volume of unsolicited manuscripts and must perforce reject many." That was my response to my rebuttal of the hon. member for Mount Royal's contribution in *The Toronto Star*.

Seriously, she makes quite a number of charges in that particular article and she touched on some of them tonight in debate. I suggest that some of the comments that my hon. friend makes are based on an honest difference of opinion on what the bill provides. I would say perhaps even a misunderstanding of what the bill provides. In fact, the article in *The Toronto Star* suggested that there might be some sort of a conspiracy on the part of the government, perhaps connected with the free trade agreement, to gut the Canadian broadcasting system.

This new act is designed to increase Canadian choices, not to restrict them. Technological advances, including direct broadcasting from high powered satellites to which my hon. friend referred, have made available new

services over which the government and the CRTC technically have no control. Canadians are embracing that progress and, indeed, it has such power and momentum that in some situations no government or people can stop it, even if they wished to. Therefore, the role of government is then to provide Canadian choices, Canadian voices, in the words of the distinguished predecessor to the present Minister of Communications, the Hon. Flora MacDonald.

The hon. member for Mount Royal criticizes this bill for not restricting foreign access to the Canadian market. In doing so, I submit that she ignores the fact that the act gives the CRTC the power to supervise and regulate the entire Canadian broadcasting system, including those carrying foreign or other programming services. Under this legislation the only foreign signals which can be legally retransmitted in Canada are those authorized by the CRTC, which is also empowered to set the terms under which such signals are retransmitted. The CRTC will continue to control entry of foreign specialty services that compete with Canadian services.

In the past my hon. friend has suggested that foreign services be licensed by the CRTC. I should point out that no Canadian laws requiring licensing can apply outside Canada. If she were to achieve this objective, Canadian cable operators would be forced to drop all their U.S. signals or to ask foreign broadcasters to set up shell Canadian companies for the purpose of holding a licence. I do not believe that Canadians would find such a proposal acceptable.

There are many charges to the Canadian broadcasting system in this bill to reflect Canada and its regions to national and regional audiences by serving the special needs of the region. Our national broadcaster, the CBC, is mandated to serve the needs of our official language minorities and to reflect the multicultural nature of Canada. That, I submit, enhances our Canadianism. As a matter of fact, we on the government side accepted an amendment from the opposition which even broadened that definition to include the multiracial aspect of our society, which is an important consideration when one considers the fact that we are dealing in large measure with television.