

Broadcasting

attention. It is almost certainly an indictment of the federal role in broadcasting, of the manner in which the federal authority has been exercised, and of the way in which the federal regulatory authority has carried out its work. Having regard to the quality of the programming now in evidence, it is not surprising to me that a provincial government should find itself constrained to set up this kind of commission.

I would hope that the CRTC, with its added concern for telecommunications, would find time to carry out the role which I believe was implied in the former designation, Board of Broadcast Governors, a body which I believe carried out as part of its duties the governing of broadcasting right to the programming end. It does not matter at all what we do with the hardware, the software, the off-air or cable broadcasting; if what is distributed to the subscriber at the end is not worth the effort, then we have truly failed. I am very skeptical that there will be any time left in the organization seriously to consider the most important aspect of all in public or private broadcasting.

● (1640)

Mr. Robert McCleave (Halifax-East Hants): Mr. Speaker, earlier in the debate the hon. member for Annapolis Valley (Mr. Nowlan) was kind enough to recall to the House that I had been in the broadcasting committee when, among other things, Miss Judy LaMarsh and I exchanged poetry, at a time when the House passed the Broadcasting Act a number of years back. I am not going to recall the poetry; I am too much of a gentleman even to publish what she sent to me. Neither will I go over all the reasons why I still bear scars from that particular occasion. This has nothing to do with Miss LaMarsh but it has a lot to do with broadcasting in Canada.

There is one feature I should like to deal with in a very brief intervention in this debate, and this is the question of cablevision—actually cable television, but cablevision since it may include radio channels as well—in the less populous areas of Canada. When this session commenced, or shortly thereafter, I put a star against a question of mine. It was a very brief question and I thought I would get a very brief answer. My question, No. 781, asked simply this:

Has the Canadian Radio-Television Commission a policy to enable Canadians in less populous areas to receive cable television and, if so, what is it?

As I say, I expected that the answer would be as brief as my question. Instead, as members can observe for themselves, I received a veritable blizzard of paper in response to my question. It not only included a recent reply as provided by the commission to the Minister of Communications (Mr. Pelletier), but also some of the decisions made by the Canadian Radio-Television Commission. As a result, I might have said to myself that the government had no policy at all, the answer was so large and I thought, in some respects at least, obtuse. I am still somewhat inclined to that opinion and I have to apologize to several bare acres of erstwhile Canadian forest which have been levelled in order to provide the paper that provided the answers given so generously not only to myself but to other members of the chamber, consisting of about 100 pages, I would guess.

Then I decided to take a second look at the matter when this particular debate came on. I have done so, and I want to review what I think are the points that the Canadian Radio-Television Commission has been operating on in regard to providing Canadians in less populous areas with cable television. Then I want to make a suggestion as to how almost everybody in Canada can receive cable television.

I make this argument because, even though my constituency be in the older, settled province of Nova Scotia, there are large parts of Halifax-East Hants which are outside the cable systems operating in the constituency. I know that as one goes across Canada, with very few exceptions this is the case. The metropolitan ridings in Toronto, Montreal, Winnipeg and Vancouver would perhaps be exceptions, but generally members must have people in their ridings who do not have the advantage enjoyed by their big cousins of receiving cable television.

I do not know whether I should be arguing the merits of cablevision and whether it is worth while receiving. There is a lot to be said for getting away from television in any shape or form, but I think most people regard it as one of the things they would at least like to have the right to turn off, if they do not already have that right, or, for that matter, the right to turn on.

The answer from the CRTC was given to the minister and tabled by him in the House in response to my question dealing with the commission's view of cable coverage in lower density areas. The first principle that I could discern from the answer of the commission was that where, in its opinion, economic conditions are such that there is little probability of a second service extending on-air coverage in the foreseeable future, the commission's view is that cable should be allowed to act as a means of bringing television to the public, and that this is sometimes the case in less populated, isolated areas of the country. I think that makes reasonable sense and explains itself. Secondly, the commission replied as follows:

Concerning the extension of existing licensed cable television systems into adjacent, less densely populated areas, existing policies require the service to be provided to any residence already provided with municipal services.

In other words, if your residence is supplied with sewer or water lines, then surely you are entitled to be on a cablevision line. The commission goes on:

While the commission has refrained from forcing the extension of services to clearly uneconomic regions, which could jeopardize the stability of licensed systems, they have always encouraged mature, well developed systems or those with a high degree of potential growth to expand into neighbouring territories even if such expansion is only marginally viable.

As the answer presented to me by the minister points out, in this regard one might refer to decisions granting licences in Sudbury and Timmins, where in both areas licensees were required to extend service throughout the respective regional municipalities. The Timmins licensee was also required to provide service to Cochrane and Iroquois Falls, notwithstanding that he had in fact not applied to service those areas. Thirdly, in looking at the policy of the CRTC as it was then and ever more shall be until royal assent is given the measure we are now considering, we find this statement: