

Oral Questions

[Translation]

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Prime Minister or his messenger boy. I do not know who will choose to respond. The Minister of Industry may feign indignation, but he cannot hide his own and the whole government's discomfort.

The chairman of the CRTC told the parliamentary committee yesterday that the government's power to issue directives never meant that it could take over the CRTC's role of setting Canada's broadcasting policy.

Does the Prime Minister or his messenger boy, his underling, not think that, by bypassing the usual decision making process in this matter, putting in place a special committee as proposed, and drafting a very specific order tailor made for Power DirecTv, the government usurped the CRTC's powers, as CRTC chairman Keith Spicer claims?

Hon. John Manley (Minister of Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we not only have the right to issue directives governing debate here in this House, but we also have the duty to set the best possible broadcasting policy for Canada.

● (1425)

That is what we did. We have not heard a single word from the official opposition about the broadcasting policies it favours.

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I will not take long. Given the kind of answer I am getting, I will try to make my question shorter and clearer. Perhaps then the minister will understand.

Mrs. Suzanne Tremblay (Rimouski—Témiscouata, BQ): Impossible! It is impossible for him to understand.

Mr. Gauthier: Given the absolutely unprecedented attack by the CRTC chairman—not just anyone but the person appointed by the government to head the CRTC—, how can the minister continue to claim that the government followed normal procedures in this matter? How can he make such a claim, when it is quite obvious that all government decisions have directly benefited Power DirecTv, in which the Prime Minister's son-in-law has interests?

Hon. John Manley (Minister of Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the problem with the hon. member's thesis is that it is wrong. Our order did not favour anyone. We proposed that the CRTC create a licensing system for everyone. We did not ask the CRTC to favour a specific group, company or individual.

[English]

The exemption order does that. It is an exemption order which is not subject to any appeal. It exists for a very limited purpose within the statute.

We have set in process a means of determining a policy which we think will be better in the interest of Canadians and the interest of consumers.

I have yet to hear from the hon. member whether he disagrees with the expert panel, whether he disagrees with Friends of Canadian Broadcasting, whether he disagrees with the Consumers Association of Canada, all of whom say this is what we should be doing. That is the advice we are taking, not his.

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MINISTER OF CANADIAN HERITAGE

Mr. Preston Manning (Calgary Southwest, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, section 23 of the federal conflict of interest code includes this guideline:

A public office holder shall take care to avoid—the appearance of being placed under any obligation to any person—that might profit from special consideration on the part of the office holder.

In September the heritage minister blatantly broke the guideline. He did not avoid the appearance of conflict of interest. He participated in a private dinner at which guests were invited to pay \$2,000 for access to the minister and after which several received government contracts.

The Prime Minister was therefore clearly wrong when he said in the House yesterday that “the minister has contravened none of our rules or directives”.

Will the Prime Minister, before he digs himself in any deeper, now demand the resignation of the Canadian heritage minister for violation of this guideline?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I replied to these questions yesterday. I said that ministers have been engaged like all members of Parliament of all parties in fundraising. The names of the people and the amount of money have been transmitted to the party according to the laws of Canada. Every minister and every member of Parliament are doing that. Everybody has to do it according to rules set out by the elections act. In this case the minister has followed that.

Mr. Preston Manning (Calgary Southwest, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, in 1987 Conservative cabinet minister Roch LaSalle held a \$5,000 a head cocktail party in a private home for a group of business people with interests in his department.

The Liberal opposition declared this to be a conflict of interest and demanded the minister's resignation. Prime Minister Mulroney, that great guardian of public ethics, eventually asked LaSalle to resign.

In 1994 the Liberal heritage minister held a \$2,000 a plate dinner at a private home for a group of business people with interests in his department. We demand his resignation and declare it to be a conflict of interest, but the Prime Minister denies there is any wrongdoing.