

Oral Questions

fulfilled, could the minister also tell Canadians what caused him to push for this premature major change in policy?

An hon. Member: More money.

Hon. Francis Fox (Secretary of State and Minister of Communications): Madam Speaker, as far as I am concerned it is not a major change in policy. The hon. member referred to the Therrien committee report. The Therrien committee is just that, Madam Speaker, it is a committee of the CRTC and it reports to the full CRTC. The announcement which was made yesterday by that body indicated that the CRTC as a whole endorsed the idea and agreed that it is urgent to have a pay TV system in this country. As I have indicated before, it is not a question of whether we will or will not have a pay TV system in this country; it is a question of whether we will have a pay TV system over which Canadians have some influence and control.

As to the hon. member's remark to the effect that no one in this country, except the people who would make a buck from it, want pay TV, I am pleased to inform him that a lot of people in the Canadian production industry, the Canadian arts and cultural community are interested in the significant financial benefits which will accrue to the Canadian program industry and the Canadian cultural industry in general, because a good part of the profits from pay TV would accrue to them.

Mr. Rose: Madam Speaker, I was quoting from the Therrien report when I mentioned that the only people who are interested were those who would make a profit. Since it is not a major change in policy, according to the minister, it means that there is no communications policy.

In view of the strong arguments against pay TV as a pipeline for just more U.S. programming and the opposition to it by the creative people who are expected to benefit—as the minister has just explained to me—since they oppose it at this time, can the minister tell us who is directing this change in policy at this time? In addition, I would like to know why major policy changes are announced months in advance of a new comprehensive bill for a Canadian telecommunications policy?

Mr. Fox: Madam Speaker, I would like to reiterate what I said initially, that the Therrien committee was just that, a committee of the CRTC. It did not represent the views of the whole of the CRTC. The CRTC in its initial press release two weeks ago indicated that it would be looking at the Therrien committee report, and on the basis of a number of recommendations in it, that it would be issuing positions it would take. Yesterday the CRTC decided to issue its position on pay television in Canada and recognized the urgency of introducing that type of system in this country.

TELEVISION SERVICE TO NORTHERN AND CENTRAL RESIDENTS

Mr. F. Oberle (Prince George-Peace River): Madam Speaker, my supplementary question is also addressed to the

Minister of Communications. The Therrien committee clearly stated that the priority must be to produce a balanced television and communications diet for people in the northern and central part of the provinces and the far north. Is the minister saying now that this is not his priority? Would he also clarify his statement which he made yesterday in Toronto, when he mentioned that something must be done about the proliferation of pirate signals in the urban centres? Is it his intention to develop a policy which will permit stations that have been established in the north to operate legally and under a licence, or will the minister close them all down? Can the minister ease this fear?

Hon. Francis Fox (Secretary of State and Minister of Communications): Madam Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for his question. He quite rightly reflected the CRTC's Therrien report to the effect that extension of services and provision for an adequate range of television services to remote and northern communities should be a priority. The full committee of the CRTC has endorsed the Therrien committee report in this regard. I indicated in my speech yesterday in Toronto that I was in full agreement with the CRTC in this connection. As a matter of fact, the CRTC has decided to hold hearings on extension of services to the north in February before any hearings will be held on pay TV. I think that issue is clear both in the Department of Communications and in the CRTC.

As to the question of pirating signals from U.S. satellites, I indicated clearly yesterday that we would pursue the present policy as far as northern communities were concerned. With regard to urban centres in Canada along the southern part of this country, where there is already a wide range of choice of TV signals, we have indicated that we would not tolerate proliferation of dishes to receive illegally U.S. satellite signals because such proliferation would clearly endanger the continued existence and viability of the Canadian broadcasting system, which we believe to be essential to the continued development of this country.

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CANADIAN BROADCASTING CORPORATION

SERVICE TO RESIDENTS OF NEW BRUNSWICK

Mr. Maurice Harquail (Parliamentary Secretary to Regional Economic Expansion): Madam Speaker, my question is to the same minister, the Secretary of State, who is responsible to this House for the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation.

While the previous points raised this afternoon are important, I would like to go back to something fundamental to Canadians. Specifically, it concerns New Brunswick's CBC television studio facilities as well as CBC radio production and broadcasting in northern New Brunswick. I invite the minister to indicate his readiness to take personal action in this matter with the CBC to ensure that after these many years New Brunswickers will catch up to the 1980s and have adequate