

*Government Orders*

• (1635)

It was in this particular clause that the government brought in its commitment to not only safeguard and develop our telecommunications system, but also its commitment to this nation's cultural integrity. This was one of the areas that caused a great deal of confusion and a great deal of debate. Later we found that the government's amendment in fact reversed its initial decision. It no longer wanted culture on the table as part of the telecommunications policy.

There was a great deal of intervention at this point. A lot of arts and culture groups throughout Canada took real issue with the government's reversal of its initial position to include culture as part of the over-all objective or thrust of our telecommunications policy. As a matter of fact, the government's decision to reverse itself on this was unfortunate because it overlooked the very nature of the convergence of this industry and the fact that if we go way back to the comments made by Marshall McLuhan, the medium is in fact the message.

The government has erred in deciding to withdraw the provision for culture from this particular section. It has erred as well in terms of some of the priorities it has established with respect to the initial objectives.

My Motion No. 6 would insert in clause 7 at line 13 on page 4 of the bill a commitment "to enhance the expression and communication of Canada's cultural identity". This is a variation of the theme which the government chose to delete from the bill.

The Alliance of Canadian Cinema made objections to deleting the phrase with respect to Canadian culture. I just want to read part of its submission to the committee. It said: "Accepting the recommendation to delete references to sovereignty, politics and culture would ignore the long-term implications of technological convergence. It would be bowing to a deregulation fever which may be premature.

Many issues relating to the transport of information through telecommunications pipelines *vis-à-vis* fibre optic tape cable, coaxial cable, et cetera, remain unanswered, such as access by programming services and compensation for rights contained in material distributed.

Moreover, we submit that those advocating the deletion of social and cultural clauses in this bill have a narrow view of the potential volume of information and business opportunities available. In short they are not looking past their bottom line at the expense of the greater public interest".

Although there were many arguments proposed as to why the government has decided to delete culture, really it comes down to the bottom line that the Quebec caucus within this government has decided it wishes to remove that phrase. That is because as we well know, Quebec has long sought to have complete sovereignty over its cultural initiatives. It would not like to see the issue of culture as part of the national framework of our telecommunications policy. That is a mistake.

Speaking on behalf of western Canadians, we feel that culture is very much part and parcel and in fact the very fabric of the make-up of our telecommunications structure. Therefore, it should be part of this legislation.

Motion No. 8 also deals with clause 7. This amendment would include a specific provision for consultation between federal and provincial governments. This would ensure that the national telecommunications policy we are trying to outline in this legislation would in fact promote regional industrial development in the telecommunications industry.

Without this particular amendment, there is simply no explicit provision in the objectives to ensure consultation between the federal and provincial governments. There is no framework for a formal procedure to ensure that a process of consultation takes place.

As a matter of fact the Government of New Brunswick in its submissions suggested that clause 7 be amended to include consultations between the federal and provincial governments. This was in order to guarantee the national telecommunications policy promotes industrial development that will build on the strengths and potentials of each province. Also, it suggested the requirements that the regulator be accessible and responsive to users and providers of telecommunications services in the provinces.

• (1640)

This amendment attempts at least to formulate some degree of structure in terms of a consultation process.