

Broadcasting Act

CRTC will be free to reduce its requirement that broadcasters maintain 50 per cent Canadian content and still be consistent with the intent of Bill C-136. The CBC's description is reduced and distinctive. These descriptions are of fundamental importance. We see the Bill as paving the way for the Canadian broadcasting system to become part of what has been known as the North American system.

I believe that the Bill has another serious flaw. There is no recognition of aboriginal services in Bill C-136. The Standing Committee on Communications and Culture recommended that a new broadcasting Act should provide for the CBC to offer service in aboriginal languages considered to be representative, where numbers warrant, and to the extent public funds permit. The Government failed to act upon the recommendation that the CBC offer service in aboriginal languages. The National Aboriginal Communications Society has expressed its dismay with the failure of the Government to act to provide this important protection.

● (1200)

Mr. Speaker, I come back to my earlier thoughts when I talked about Canadian content, about the importance in this country of looking at Canadian content—and it is a reality that we must address—and Canadians, whether they are watching television or listening to the radio, do so in great numbers. There are some individuals who will say, well, perhaps parents ought to have a more active role in the determination of what their children watch or listen to on the airwaves. That is correct. I share that sentiment. But the reality that we must face is that Canadians, in great numbers, are watching a great deal of television and of course listening in great amounts to radio. Therefore, it becomes increasingly important that the Government try to address some of the concerns that I and indeed other Members have raised. I look forward to hearing some of the responses from Members opposite, as well as my colleagues, as this debate continues.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments. The Hon. Minister of Communications (Miss MacDonald).

Miss MacDonald: I just have a brief comment, Mr. Speaker. For the enlightenment of the Member who has just spoken, I think that it is important to note that perhaps he has not read the Bill thoroughly. What has been done in this case was to use the words that had applied only to the CBC in the previous Bill, in the 1968 Bill, words such as "enlightenment", and now move them into a position in the Bill where they apply to the entire Canadian broadcasting system, including the CBC. But what we have done is to stipulate that distributors, carriers, the private network, the public network, all of them take into consideration that word, "enlightenment".

I also want to assure him that if he will read through the Bill carefully he will see that the question of our aboriginal societies are addressed within the Bill. All of these things are introduced into the Bill. Although previously there was a very limited application of these requirements to the public

broadcasting service only, they now apply to the whole range of services that fall within the Canadian broadcasting system. Public as well as private carriers, such as cable and so on, all have these particular requirements attached to them now.

Mr. Dingwall: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the Minister's intervention. I hope that her comments achieve the objective that I have enunciated.

Miss MacDonald: It think they do.

Mr. Dingwall: It seems to me that the removal of "enlightenment" will in fact weaken the distinctive quality of the CBC programming. If the Minister is able to convince me over a period of time that that particular objective that she has spoken of—and that I have just spoken of—is reached in the Bill, well, fine and good. If not, in the interpretation that I and my colleagues have been able to wrestle with as it relates to this particular Bill, we believe it is a serious omission. However, I do appreciate the intervention of the Minister on this matter.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Resuming debate with the Hon. Member for Winnipeg North (Mr. Orlikow).

Mr. David Orlikow (Winnipeg North): Mr. Speaker, I want to enter this debate because I have been watching what is happening to broadcasting, both public and private, for many years, and the more I see what has happened and how little we have done and how often we have done the wrong thing, the more depressed I get. In this Bill I see very little, if anything, that will begin to change the depressing realities.

First of all, let me point out that what the Minister is proposing in this Bill and what the reality is since the Conservatives formed this Government, has been that the public sector broadcasting is underfunded. In large measure, this is the result of this Conservative Government's four-year vendetta against the CBC, which has led to a \$140 million reduction in the network's allocation from Parliament.

I also want to point out that the private broadcasters are not doing their job. Twenty years ago, when I was on the parliamentary committee which dealt with this kind of question, I took the time to look through the applications of the groups or the individuals whose applications were successful, those to be given a licence to set up a TV station and to broadcast from any of the cities across Canada. I am talking not about all of the applications but about the successful applications. Every one of them had grandiose proposals about how they would provide Canadian content if their application was approved. It is not just public affairs and sports, but drama, variety and comedy. You name it, they promised it. Of course, as soon as they got the licence, they proceeded to ignore every promise that they had made.

What we have now is a private system of television stations, certainly in the major cities, that—as one commentator who has studied the question has said—have been given a licence to print money.