

Government Orders

We have seen the process take place already with the advent of the free trade agreement, the artificially elevated high interest rates, the dollar inflating policies of this administration, the abandonment of a search for an independent foreign policy, and the lock-step with the United States on security issues.

The CBC is not easily harmonized with American institutions and that is what is causing some problems for this government. Its history, its development, its function, its mandate, its role do not fit with the concept of harmonizing with our neighbour to the south. The CBC is quintessentially Canadian. It is a Canadian achievement and we should be proud of it. It evokes a Canadian style in broadcasting. It is not, I submit, a private enterprise achievement but it is a public one.

The CBC is not easily harmonized but it can be, and it will be. It is being underfunded. It is being organizationally neutered. It is being economically emasculated as a first step in its demise. The division of the CBC board into English and into French weakens the CBC as a national institution. If the government sees no value in a publicly-owned and autonomously operated public broadcasting service, then it will do what it can to lessen the distinctiveness of that service. That, Mr. Speaker, is exactly what is happening.

Under this strategy the national broadcasting service comes more and more to resemble the private networks, until essentially the rationale for having the service in the first place is lost and then, "what the heck, guys? We may as well privatize it". It becomes a distant memory.

The legislation advances a strategy that sees little value in public broadcasting and sees no point in perpetuating something that is vigorously and quintessentially Canadian.

I would like to turn to native broadcasting because I think that this legislation seriously erodes the initiatives in that regard. The objective should have been to strengthen aboriginal broadcasting provisions through this legislation. Many of the amendments we had proposed in fact pointed in that very specific direction. Those amendments were voted down.

This bill reads that "programming that reflects the aboriginal cultures of Canada should be provided within the Canadian broadcasting system as resources become available". Fine. But then this bill gives little priority to communications difficulties and realities of Canada's

aboriginal communities, particularly our northern communities.

The Broadcasting League noted that the government's proposal makes no provision at all for broadcasting services for aboriginal people. Examining the government record does not inspire confidence. The northern native broadcast access program funds 13 communications societies. Since it was established in 1983, it has had its funding cut, and cut, and cut again. The Northern Native Broadcast Access Program was created to ensure that northern native people would have fair access to distribution systems. This was given in order to maintain a native culture, a native identity, and to maintain the native languages. The aim was also to help create programming that is relevant to native communities and to reflect their concerns.

• (1850)

How has it fared? In 1983, the program was given a budget of over \$40 million for four years. In 1985 and 1986, the government reduced the funding to \$33 million. In 1987-88 and 1988-89 and, again in 1989-90, funding was frozen at \$13.2 million, down from \$40 million to \$13 million. In this year's budget, the Conservative government cut back the program to \$11.3 million. It has completely knee-capped this program. It has completely emasculated its ability to serve our native communities.

The proposed legislation reflects a basic lack of support for aboriginal communications. This government is attacking aboriginal cultural expression and is attacking aboriginal peoples at the worst possible time. The legislation simply does not go far enough in ensuring access and control of communications by our aboriginal peoples.

My time is limited but I want to make a few comments with regard to the cable television industry. Cable TV in Canada is a territorial monopoly but it is not regulated by other communications industries. The bill simply does not undertake to regulate the profits made by these companies in an industry that earns, on an average, 30 per cent of its net fixed assets annually. It is completely unregulated in that regard.

Does this bill provide cable television rates for Canadians that are just and fair? We submit that the answer is no. Many amendments were made to try to strengthen that part of the proposed legislation and all of those amendments were defeated.