

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

BROADCASTING ACT

MEASURE TO AMEND

The House resumed consideration of the motion of Mr. Masse that Bill C-40, an act respecting broadcasting and to amend certain acts in relation thereto and in relation to radiocommunication, be read the third time and passed.

Mrs. Sheila Finestone (Mount Royal): Mr. Speaker, it was extremely interesting to debate on the environment that interrupted my speech. Certainly, it is a key player in every aspect of anything we undertake to do. The media and communicating those concerns are vital and key to an understanding by the population and by business people of the role that the environment plays in all our lives, whether one is young or old, in business or just at leisure.

I would like to welcome the parliamentary secretary, the hon. member for Edmonton Southwest, and congratulate him upon his daughter's recent marriage.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

Mrs. Finestone: He has today, I believe, returned from Australia and we welcome him. He will be probably the only voice heard from the other side of the floor, and a welcomed and knowledgeable one at that. Certainly his voice has been the one we have heard most consistently. We do congratulate him and welcome him back.

Previously, I was talking about the CRTC's executive committee and the collegial decision-making process on those issues of very serious importance to an even broadcasting environment across the land. This has now been replaced with the principle of "who hears decides", whereby panels of three will be empowered to make binding decisions on the entire commission. The introduction of the "who hears decides" concept, together with the ability of the cabinet to direct the CRTC to establish regional offices, will profoundly change the way the commission goes about its hearings and decision making.

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The new regionalization concept, coupled with binding panel decisions, will erode the consistency, uniformity and quality of the decision-making process and could lead to the Balkanization of the CRTC.

Keith Spicer, the temporary chairman of the CRTC, who I believe will return this mandate later, appearing before the legislative committee, recommended against this approach. I know he changed his song. However, I think the circumstances on which he changed that song might well be examined. I will not go into that any further at this moment.

He said in essence at committee that "In broadcasting you have to look at the whole matrix of issues, many of them very subtle, cultural issues, and I mean regional cultural issues. It is not only a matter of law, it is a matter of common sense, sensitivity, as well as law. That is why in the broadcasting area we think it is much better to have one national consensus so that we can compare what we are doing in Newfoundland" to that which is being done in Saskatchewan or up in Iqaluit or anywhere across this land and to "make sure that all Canadians feel they are being treated in the same way. And at a time when there are some regional inter-ethnic tensions in Canada we ought to be looking for some of these mechanisms to have a strong national view, but with much greater sensitivity to regional concerns."

I think that that is happening, Mr. Speaker, and we do not have to change the mechanism to have that sensitivity to regional concerns. He went on to say: "We all know that this whole process is like squaring a circle, but that is what we are trying to do, and in our honest opinion we think it could be done better that way." The way it was done before, in other words.

Mr. Edwards: I rise on a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I do not wish to abuse the charity and goodwill which the hon. member for Mount Royal acknowledged when she welcomed me into the House. However, I did want to have some clarification as to whether the Official Opposition has signalled a departure from House practice in the use of a podium for a debate. I believe that the Official Opposition has denied the Prime Minister the opportunity to use a podium in this House and that indeed the House practice is that the only occasion on which such use is made of a podium is when the Minister of Finance is delivering the Budget.