

Government Orders

[English]

Mr. Ian Waddell (Port Moody—Coquitlam): Mr. Speaker, I rise, as the critic for the New Democratic Party on the issue of communications and culture, to speak on this bill.

[Translation]

I am happy to see that the Minister was here to listen to the speeches. Yet, I see no *Oscar* and I am anxious to see the Minister's *Oscar*.

[English]

That is why I call him Oscar Masse. I expected to see the minister with his Oscar here today, but perhaps he is hiding it from us.

We have seen this bill before. This is the broadcasting act that was passed in the last Parliament—well not quite, it passed this House of Commons, but it did not get through the Senate and therefore it never became the law of Canada.

We need a broadcasting act because the act that is still in force goes back to 1968. We have had a lot of new technology in the meantime, especially in the cable industry. So we have to update the act.

The previous process was a long one. We had numerous debates here in Parliament and we had long committee hearings. As a result of that process there were numerous amendments made to what I thought was a very flawed bill when the original broadcasting bill was introduced in the last Parliament. I was happy to see that the government accepted some of my amendments and other amendments that were put forward by different groups. We took a bad bill and we made it better, but not good enough.

• (1410)

This is very important. Adults watch television 24 hours a week, and our young people watch it even more. I will say something more about that in my speech later on. I think this is one of the most important bills that this Parliament could consider, so we have to take time with it and we have to do it right. We have to try once again to make this bill better.

There are some changes to this particular bill from the one we debated in the last Parliament. Let me just summarize those changes so that we know what we are talking about. The first one is that educational broadcast-

ers received a clause that they wanted, recognizing their integral role in the broadcasting system. This is something that we in the NDP proposed as an amendment at report stage last time and, naturally, we think it represents an improvement. I am glad it is part of the bill.

Second, local stations are given priority status on cable over satellite to cable services such as TSN and Much Music. That reflects the importance of local broadcasting.

Third, the job of the chair of the CBC is explicitly defined as part-time. That raises some difficulties which we can explore in the committee, which we explored last night when we had Mr. Patrick Watson, the new chair of the CBC board, in front of our committee. He seemed to define it as a full-time job but in the act it is defined as a part-time job. I am confident he will do a good job there. He is a distinguished Canadian. But we have to look carefully at this set-up between a part-time chair of a very conservative board of directors and a full-time president.

The fourth change is that more importantly, the definition of broadcasting has been changed to include SMATV systems in the broadcast act. This means that Bell, which is explicitly prohibited from operating under the broadcasting legislation, cannot operate such a service. This change should be viewed as positive, in my view, since HDTV, or the direct delivery of programs from a central bank to a particular television set upon request, could well be the wave of the future. This is really the future technology. It is important that the criteria of all types of broadcasting be applied to it as well.

In other words, in a few years you will be able to turn on your TV and phone in or press some buttons and call up, as we can here in our House of Commons system, a particular movie or program that you want to see. This is a tremendous tool to education. It could be a tremendous waste as well unless there is some regulatory criteria put on what you can call up. In other words, we want some Canadian content in that as well.

As I said, the previous bill was passed by the House. There were some amendments passed then. There are some good changes in this bill. The bill has been improved in the process but I believe that the bill is still flawed. I want to deal with some of the questions about