

Government Orders

At a time when convergence is critical to the activities of our cultural industries, it was important to rescind the decision separating two things that, by nature, belong together: telecommunications and broadcasting. The message this government sends to people in the communications business is that financial interests will take precedence over cultural interests in Canada and Quebec. That is a very serious problem because the value to be gained from the information highway will not be the physical network itself, but rather the information travelling through that network.

I would also like to say that today, we are witnessing another shift toward the industry department. Indeed, as for copyrights, the federal government chose to leave to the Department of Industry jurisdiction over foreign investments in cultural industries, thus giving to the Department of Canadian Heritage only the power to develop cultural policies. The former Department of Communications had that power. It used it to develop a publishing policy which the government light-heartily violated in the Ginn case and in the Maxwell-McMillan versus Prentice-Hall case, as well.

I am getting to the conclusion, which is simple: this government, with its Bill C-53, once again simply lacks vision.

At the dawn of this crucial year for our collective future, the Canadian government had a unique opportunity to send clear messages to the citizens of this country, whom the Department of Canadian Heritage has a mandate to protect. As a member of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition, this saddens me. But as a sovereignist, I am very happy that the government did exactly the opposite of what Canadians were expecting, but exactly what Quebecers were hoping for.

It simply denied the existence of our nation. It does not suggest any move to frenchify English Canada and to stop the bilingualization of Quebec. On the contrary, in our opinion, clause 4(2)(g), which provides for the advancement of the equality of status and use of French and English, is not even worth the paper on which it is written. Finally, the government has not lived up to the expectations it had instilled in creative artists and an important part of the tools it could use to defend culture and creators is now in the hands of the Department of Industry. The government has just officially placed an important part of the Canadian Heritage under its administrative supervision.

For all those reasons, the Bloc Québécois will oppose this bill. It is narrow-minded, dangerous for the Canadian nation and disrespectful towards creative artists. There is only one hope for Quebecers, which is to choose to have their own country. Only then will they be able to express their own culture and have it recognized for the best of our collective future.

[English]

Mrs. Jan Brown (Calgary Southeast, Ref.): Madam Speaker, I rise to speak at third reading of Bill C-53, an act to establish the Department of Canadian Heritage.

• (1230)

I must say it has been a unique experience to participate in the process of presenting this bill to the House, to hear the responses of so many of my colleagues at second reading, to acknowledge the efforts of all of us in committee and now finally to speak once again at this next step in its passage. In my view this represents the best of what democracy has to offer us: freedom of speech and the opportunity to disagree and present alternative points of view. Having said that, will we be left yet again with the status quo?

Speaking from this side of the House I believe that our point of view has enriched the debate as the government has continued its creation of a superministry of cultural identity. We have presented many arguments to challenge the new ministry. As I have said before, it denies us an opportunity to define ourselves as Canadians despite the insistence of some that it provides and promotes greater understanding and a greater sense of intercultural endeavour.

What is occurring is the legislative entrenchment of grants to a host of special interest groups. The total of all special interest group funding throughout all government departments is rumoured to be approximately \$500 million. The government has not been specific in terms of the cuts it plans to make to special interest groups. Responses have ranged from the preparation of guidelines to the anticipation of reduced funding. There is nothing explicit in that regard but to wait until the February 1995 budget.

It is obvious the government is not comfortable discussing expenditure reduction. This is odd especially at a time when Canadians are seeking a more open approach to governance. It is also odd at a time when the opportunity to present a model for change, as has been presented in the creation of the Department of Canadian Heritage, has not been seized. The circle of virtue is reduced to a vicious circle and the status quo remains.

The ministry consolidates several subcabinet departments: the Secretary of State; the Department of Multiculturalism and Citizenship; the Department of Fitness and Amateur Sport; Parks Canada; components of Environment Canada; and the heritage component of the Department of Communications. I will focus further on a number of these departments in this presentation.

Given the unacceptable, incomprehensible and contemptuous personal attack made yesterday by my colleague from Carleton—Gloucester with no regard or relationship to Bill C-53, I will clarify for the member the Reform Party's position on languages. I hope he will be able to understand this clear policy.