

*Radio Act*

dio electronic equipment as a result of radio transmissions and clarifies the Government's right to administer the radio communications industry.

It seems to me to be strictly a technical bill, unless I have missed something. I know that the Radio Act has not been amended since 1938, and some housekeeping was in order. I believe that the cultural, social and political aspects of communications policy are unaffected by the Bill, although I will have something to say about that policy in a couple of minutes. I believe that the Bill is an improvement for consumers in that it shifts the onus from consumers to manufacturers and importers for ensuring that certain technical standards for radio equipment are met. That is good.

The Bill was first introduced last summer. I vaguely remember that summer, and I do not believe there has been any public criticism. We have canvassed the industry, and there seems to be wide acceptance of the Bill.

On behalf of the NDP, we can support this Bill here in second reading. The Bill represents an important updating of legislation which is somewhat out of step. The original Radio Act, as I said, was enacted in 1938. It has received some minor amendment since then, but it remains essentially the same Act. I do not think the original drafters of the Radio Act could possibly have imagined, even if they had let their imaginations soar, the explosion of activities that this Act must now administer. While this Bill is highly technical and non-contentious, it has a wide-ranging impact on various forms of communications in Canada. It governs sophisticated satellite communications and allocations of radio frequencies, both national and in conjunction with the member countries of the International Telecommunications Union. It also deals with somewhat bland every-day activities. I do not know if you have an instrument that opens your garage door, Madam Speaker, but that will be dealt with under this Act.

• (1240)

As I stated, the Parliamentary Secretary has dealt with the effects of the legislation as a whole. However, I would like to underline two points. First, this legislation does improve the lot of consumers. It shifts the responsibility for the control of sub-standard devices from the consumer onto the manufacturer or the importer. As it presently stands, Madam Speaker, if you have a defective

garage door opener which causes radio interference with a local radio station in the neighbourhood, you are liable. I do not know if many people know that. This Bill places the onus on the business that sells those products. After all, those businesses are the ones with the engineers, and they are the ones ultimately responsible for ensuring that those products operate properly in an electro-magnetically cluttered world.

The Department of Communications will have the ability to ensure that standards are set and maintained for those products. This may all seem a little arcane but when one considers that radio signals can potentially interfere with such equipment as heart pacemakers and railway crossing gates, its importance becomes very clear.

I would also like to deal with the suggestion in the background papers to this Bill that the Bill will permit the Government to increase Canadian control over its radio-communications industries. It is true that the enabling power found in the Bill will allow the Government to do this, if it so chooses. I am satisfied that this provision is there. However, I am not confident that the Government will in fact use it.

The New Democratic Party has been fighting hard to ensure that the tools of communications in Canada remain in Canadian hands. This is where the Government has fallen down in the past. At the moment, the majority of radio communications, the majority of the industry in Canada, is in fact Canadian controlled. The question is, will it remain Canadian controlled? If one looks at our other instruments of communicating Canadian culture, a far different story will be seen. As a former television star, Madam Speaker, perhaps you will know that the film industry is 97 per cent foreign controlled. Let me give an example of how the Government has worked on this in the past.

The Government realized and commissioned studies, and also had reports from the Standing Committee on Culture about the situation of the film industry. The Government drafted a Bill in which it would take part of the market for Canadian film distributors. What happened? We had the free trade negotiations. Mr. Jack Valenti of the Motion Pictures Association of the United States, who was very close to the then President Ronald Reagan, said that Canadians could not do that. Then people such as Mr. Gotlieb, who was our Ambassador and is now the head of the Canada Council, sent back