

Broadcasting Act

is of great concern, I believe, to many people of this country, and particularly to parents.

The hon. member for St. John's East (Mr. McGrath) has brought before us a very urgent matter, and although there is at present no extensive body of knowledge on the subject of child-directed advertising, this has not prevented the development of some very definite views ranging from severe criticism to proposals for complete abolition. And that is what we find in Bill C-22. The hon. member for St. John's East has presented the House with a bill which is straightforward, unambiguous, even blunt. He is not endeavouring to regulate, reform or even control advertising directed at children, but to eliminate it. The bill is very clear. It states that no advertisements shall be permitted during the broadcast of a program devoted to children.

How important, really, is a question such as advertising directed at children? How much urgency should be attached to it compared with other national needs? Should this parliament, with so many other pressing concerns before it, spend time worrying about commercials aimed at children?

Some hon. Members: Yes.

Mr. Penner: I hear a chorus of members saying, yes. Allow me to join that chorus. A report recently prepared for the Canadian Advertising Board and entitled "The Child's World and Television Advertising" states clearly that a sizeable minority of people in Canada are in favour of stringent controls on advertising directed at children, or the abolition of such advertising. While current concern in Canada has not so far resulted in a public hearing, I think that such a public hearing is long overdue. Hearings of this kind have taken place in the United States and it is about time this parliament took a look at all or some of the possible adverse effects of advertising directed at children. There is a need, in my view, for more study and further investigation. It is largely on this basis that I willingly lend my support to Bill C-22, and was pleased to second it in the hope that it will be sent to a committee for closer scrutiny.

The whole question of what to do about child-directed advertising is too extensive a topic to be decided during a brief debate. At the same time, the problem is too crucial to allow us to have this bill talked out and tumbled to the bottom of the order paper. I, therefore, urge all hon. members to allow the measure before us to proceed to a committee where the many aspects of the subject can be duly considered in depth through the hearing of witnesses and through the examination of briefs which will undoubtedly be presented.

The hon. member for St. John's East mentioned that the Canadian Association of Broadcasters has adopted a broadcasting code to govern advertising directed at children. I am sure all hon. members welcome this action toward self-regulation which has been taken by the broadcasting industry. We should not feel, however, that simply because such a code is in existence the problems which may exist as a result of advertising directed at children have been solved or that legislation is not necessary. There is, I believe, a need either to eliminate such advertising or, at least, to mitigate possible adverse effects

[Mr. Penner.]

caused by television advertising directed at children. The broadcast code governing advertising for children presents an interesting example of potential self-regulation by an industry, but has the code been strictly enforced? Is it perhaps necessary to go much further by amending the Broadcasting Act and introducing regulations which would be much more effective in controlling whatever adverse effects may be produced by this kind of advertising? The hon. member for St. John's East has given us the opportunity to make these inquiries and I hope we shall find some answers when this bill goes to the committee.

In the brief time still left to me, I should like to say a little more about my personal concern in relation to advertising directed at children. The hon. member for St. John's East mentioned the amount of time children spend watching television programs. Many of these programs contain commercials which are directed specifically to the younger age groups. What does this do? Certainly, all advertising has the effect of stimulating expectations. I sometimes wonder how many children have been disappointed or disillusioned when what they were led to expect was not fulfilled in reality. We all know that children have little or no purchasing power and so are dependent on their parents to fulfil their desire for advertised products. What happens, particularly in low income families, when their demands cannot be met? Is advertising directed at children responsible for causing frustration and conflict in many Canadian homes? I suspect it is. The code for advertising for children, which has been referred to earlier, does say, of course, that advertising must not urge children to ask their parents to purchase products. That is what it says, but can we seriously believe that such a restriction will effectively eliminate undue pressure on parents? Not likely!

• (1720)

The two products that are chiefly involved in children's television advertising are toys and breakfast cereals. Exposure to these advertisements will almost certainly lead children to influence their parents to make purchases. What do these particular products represent? Recreation and nutrition. These surely are matters of some considerable importance to most parents. We wonder whether children's advertising may seriously undermine the parents' own choice of values for their children, so that instead of deciding what they should do for recreation and what they should eat that is nutritionally valuable, it is decided for them through the television media.

Some people, of course, believe that if you have codes or guidelines you may lessen the evil. But others feel very strongly that what is needed is not a lessening of the evil but that the evil disappear completely. So perhaps nothing short of abolition of advertising aimed at children can be regarded as reasonable. Such is the proposal contained in Bill C-22, and in my view it ought to be carefully examined by a committee. All of the aspects of the problem must be carefully looked at by the members of such a committee. I, therefore, urge once more that members allow this bill to proceed for further examination.

I conclude, Mr. Speaker, by commending the hon. member for St. John's East for bringing forward this bill which I am pleased to support. I also ask other hon.