

*Broadcasting Act*

We cannot discuss the issue of French and English broadcasting without mentioning the presence of our two official languages. In the case of broadcasting, this presence is more than a constitutional reality, it is a fact throughout our broadcasting networks.

The Bill recognizes, for the first time, this country's linguistic duality. Many Francophone Canadians outside Quebec—in Ontario and New Brunswick, for instance—receive very few signals, if any, in their own language. Clause 3 contains provisions in this respect.

To remedy the situation, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation will have to play a more important role. Its services must be offered in both official languages to reflect the specific situation and needs of both language communities, including official language minority groups.

The Bill also provides that the broadcasting system should safeguard, enrich and strengthen the cultural, political, social and economic fabric of Canada. The production of drama programming is essential in order to achieve this goal.

● (1140)

[English]

Bill C-136 will preserve and enhance the uniquely Canadian mix of private and public broadcasting while providing for even greater diversity in programming choices and encouraging continued technological advancement. It is forward-looking legislation that will guide the Canadian broadcasting system well into the 21st century.

Clause 3 of the Bill states that the programming provided by the Canadian broadcasting system should be varied and comprehensive, providing a balance of information, enlightenment and entertainment for people of different ages, interests and tastes. It should also provide a reasonable opportunity for the public to be exposed to the expression of differing views on matters of public concern.

Just as important, for the first time, the new Broadcasting Act recognizes the great diversity of Canadian society and, in the spirit of the Charter of Rights, the need to ensure equitable presentation for all Canadians within the broadcasting system. The Bill also acknowledges the bilingual, multicultural and regional nature of the country and the special place of aboriginal peoples in our society.

In order to achieve policy objectives, public broadcasting has always been an important part of our broadcasting system. The Bill reaffirms the Government's commitment to a strong and independent Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. The CBC remains the central element of the Canadian broadcasting policy.

It is recognized, however, that the CBC cannot be the only source of Canadian programming, and that it can no longer be expected to provide all types of programming for all interests and tastes. The Bill therefore reflects the need to ensure that

all elements of the broadcasting system contribute to programming objectives and takes steps to increase Canadian choices.

To encourage more special interest in Canadian television programming the Bill provides for a new alternative programming service. This will offer the kind of programs that Canadians have said they want to see but which would otherwise not be available because of their non-commercial nature and the high cost of television production. The ultimate form and structure would be shaped by public hearings to be undertaken by the CRTC so that all Canadians will have an opportunity to express their views.

The CRTC will also have access to a wider range of tools to enforce its regulations and conditions of licence. In addition to fines and such legal recourse as mandatory orders, the CRTC is given the power to regulate more flexibly, with a licence fee tied to performance.

Recognizing the regional nature of Canada the Bill provides for decentralization and streamlining of the CRTC's decision-making process. Panels of commissioners holding hearings across the country will be able to make decisions quickly. They will reflect more accurately local circumstances and conditions within the context of a national regulatory framework. These and other changes to the CRTC's structure and administration will improve greatly its effectiveness as a regulator and its responsiveness to the industry and the Canadian public.

For these reasons the new Broadcasting Act as set out in Bill C-136 is legislation of major importance for all Canadians. The Minister of Communications (Miss MacDonald) is justly proud of this Bill. It is an outstanding document reflecting and responding to one of the most important public policy discussions undertaken by this Government.

**Mr. Dave Dingwall (Cape Breton—East Richmond):** Mr. Speaker, I wish to join in the debate on Bill C-138 and to say to my colleague from the great Province of New Brunswick, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Communications (Mr. Clinch), that although he has spoken with his usual eloquence I must say that we are going to have to agree to disagree when it comes to the substantive parts of his remarks.

I would like to outline very briefly some of the concerns that I have with regard to this particular piece of legislation. There can be no doubt of its importance. The fact of the matter is that watching television is perhaps the number one leisure activity for many, if not all, Canadians. Canadians spend more than 24 hours each week on average in front of the television set. Each year Canadian children watch almost 1,000 hours of television compared to attending school for 800 hours. We should reflect on that fact for a moment—1,000 hours in front of the television set compared with 800 hours in school. Can anyone doubt the importance of the substantive arguments that have been made by colleagues on all sides of the House, particularly my colleague from Mount Royal, who has outlined very clearly the position of my Party about the importance that the content of television and radio plays?