

*Government Orders*

I want to say that a great deal of credit for the attempts to improve and strengthen this piece of legislation have to go to the hon. member for Port Moody—Coquitlam. He has a great deal of work and I hope I can do him justice in presenting the summary debate at third reading stage of Bill C-40.

All of us in the New Democratic Party were delighted when the government brought forward a broadcast bill, a communications policy, because we recognized for some time that there was a real need to upgrade, update, or modernize what was essentially an outmoded and outdated policy with regard to broadcasting in Canada.

We were excited about the prospects of the bill and even more excited about the opportunity to address many of the outstanding concerns regarding the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, the CRTC, and native broadcasting. There are many aspects to this legislation. It is a large bill, a large piece of legislation. As we saw, there was some 42 different amendments, many of them proposed by the hon. member for Port Moody—Coquitlam on behalf of the New Democrats and many proposed by the Liberals.

At the outset I want to say that it is somewhat perplexing because we wanted so much to be able to support this legislation, to give it the strong mandate that we feel it requires. It was very disappointing—and I think I speak for all members of the opposition—to find that virtually every amendment, every reason to change that we tried to bring in through committee and through report stage debates, was essentially turned down. The government turned a deaf ear toward these amendments; not all 42 of them because some were actually the government's amendments, but certainly all of them put forward by the opposition parties.

It was very disappointing to find that a piece of legislation which could have been a hallmark of this legislative Chamber, a piece of legislation which could have set the future of broadcasting in Canada, had been left severely compromised because last night the government reacted with stony silence on the amendments and essentially voted every one of them down.

It is with some discomfort that we in the opposition, even though we so much want to support the legislation, find that we simply cannot do that without the amendments to strengthen it. I want to present the reasons for that.

Essentially the bill attempts to chart the future of broadcasting in Canada. It represents some very fine work by the officials in the Department of Communications, some very fine work by the standing committee, and some fine work by all those people—government members as well as opposition members—who have participated in its formulation at all stages. Yet, despite that and the prime opportunity that we have to make this a top notch piece of legislation, it remains essentially flawed. It is deficient in five crucial areas of broadcasting.

First, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation is brought essentially under siege by this legislation. As has been mentioned numerous times in this assembly, the CBC through Bill C-40 is being leached and it is being meeched. It is being cut back in its expenditures in terms of fulfilling a national mandate of communications in Canada and of binding this country from coast to coast to coast, and as a national voice, a national symbol of Canadian identity. It is being meeched. It is being divided into two realities: the reality of French broadcasting and the reality of English broadcasting, an essential duality in communications in Canada. We think that is wrong.

Second, with respect to the cable television industry, which is a virtual monopoly in Canada, under this bill the industry remains unregulated in terms of profits and the ability to import foreign programming, essentially the only monopoly in Canada that has absolutely no price structure regulation brought to it. We will speak more about that later.

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Third, private broadcasters are still not doing enough in the creation of Canadian programming, and this bill does precious little to rectify that weakness in our communications policy.

Fourth, in terms of the weakness of this particular bill, through this legislation the government is threatening the independence of the Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission, the CRTC. The CRTC requires specific legislative remedies to give it the kind of direction and the kind of mandate it needs to set firm policies for the future. Instead, it is being weakened and emasculated by direct ministerial control.