

Government Orders

Somali and Vietnamese, even though Vietnamese is only the sixteenth largest ethnic group in the province”.

Surely British Columbia holds the gold medal for assimilation, since it does not offer any health services in French to its French-speaking population.

• (1220)

The spokesperson for the provincial Department of Health, Mrs. Susan Gee, explains the situation this way, and I quote: “There are not enough Francophones in British Columbia”. Yet, there are more Francophones than Vietnamese. “They are not considered immigrants and they are expected to be bilingual since they are Canadians”. In other words, they are expected to speak English.

Other provinces have no policy regarding the provision of health services in the minority language. As one witness told the committee: “Call 911 just to see if you can get service in French”. When you think about everything the federal government said against user fees and its refusal to do anything to provide health services in French, there is only one conclusion to be drawn.

The third reason why we oppose this bill is that it gives the Minister of Heritage the power to legislate with regard to copyright. Let me remind the House that we have been waiting now for almost nine years for the Copyright Act to be amended. Let me also remind the House that the legislation was supposed to be amended under the previous government and that the current Minister of Heritage, when he was appointed, appeared before the Committee on Canadian Heritage, that was last April, and told us that the reform of the legislation was one of his priorities. At that time, he said it was only a matter of weeks before he could table the bill. However, creative artists will not even see the legislation before Christmas.

Why? Because the Copyright Act is essentially the responsibility of the Department of Industry. Every creative artists' group has demanded that the act be transferred to the Department of Heritage. All those who came before the committee indicated that the Department of Industry is in a conflict of interests in this matter. Indeed, the department must protect the interests of consumers and corporations, which are in direct contradiction with the rights and interests of the artists.

Before the election, even the Liberal Party had recognized that this was inappropriate. In response to questions by the Canadian Conference of the Arts, the Liberals wrote: “The Liberal Party will have as a priority to review the Copyright Act. We will make sure that, above all, the writers reap the fruit of their labours, while easing the access to copyrighted material. Liberals understand how important copyrights are. That is why we will review the Conservative decision to share this jurisdic-

tion between two departments, when reorganizing the administration.”

This at least is one case where the Liberal Party has not kept its word and that is most unfortunate. In an almost unprecedented effort of manipulation, the chairman of the heritage committee did his best to make us and the witnesses believe that his government had, in fact, proceeded to review the Conservative decision but had finally decided that it was more logical to leave the responsibility of the Copyright Act with the Department of Industry.

His attempt to save face failed. Indeed, senior officials from the Department of Industry, who drafted Bill C-46 establishing this department, said before the industry committee that all they did was put into legislative terms Ms. Campbell's reform. This evidence was corroborated by Heritage Canada officials who, during the briefing session given to our staff, stated that Bill C-53 was just a housekeeping bill whose sole purpose was to put into legislative terms the Campbell reform, and not to correct its flaws.

Officials from the Department of Industry went even further. When questioned by the committee chairman, they stated that it would not help to add a reference to copyright in the Heritage Canada legislation. They said that if we had to add this kind of reference every time the interests of two departments overlapped, we would never see the end of it. By saying this, these officials confirmed what many had told us in committee, that the government amendment to Bill C-53 regarding copyright does not give the minister any new powers.

As my colleague for Richelieu said in committee, since the legislative power with regard to copyright rests with the Department of Industry, the protection of the rights of creative artists comes down to a matter of credibility and the strength of individual ministers.

• (1225)

Given the clout and credibility of the present Minister of Canadian Heritage, creative artists have good reason to be pessimistic, and they have the whole-hearted sympathy of the official opposition.

By its refusal to give copyright legislation to the Department of Canadian Heritage, the government has shown that it could not care less about creative artists. It sends an alarming signal to the artistic community and cultural industries. We all remember the decision made in the Ginn transaction, and we all know how that sorry saga ended.

I cannot conclude without saying a word on our last two reasons for voting against this bill. Against all logic, as far as the defence of our cultural industries is concerned, the Canadian government maintained another decision made by Ms. Campbell, splitting broadcasting and telecommunications.