

that because we are such a diverse nation and have so many regions, provinces should have some kind of input in determining policy and some kind of control over distributing broadcasting signals to the more remote parts of the province where, for example, an expansion of educational television could take place beyond the very narrow definition that applies in this area.

● (1600)

I mentioned many of these points at second reading. I do not want to dwell on them again except to say I am disappointed that the bill does not go further: it is only a housekeeping bill. However, I think it does acknowledge that the federal government and the provinces are at a stalemate; they are not making progress. This will certainly hamper the whole country in regard to a national broadcasting policy.

I would like to re-emphasize a few fears I have about the bill just as a housekeeping bill. I hope that because the Liberal members of the committee and the minister have not chosen to make amendments along some of the lines I have suggested in my remarks at this time, they will keep these points in mind for future legislation. I worry about combining the telecommunications aspect of the CTC with the CRTC into this new, super agency because, as I stated earlier, there are parallels where this has happened in the United States with the federal communications commission. Where there is a big agency, there is a tendency to have a fixation on technology and to be worried about the technical aspects of cable distribution, distribution of signals, the kind of equipment and all those nuts and bolts kinds of worries and to lose sight of some of the very important aspects of content. I think the CRTC, the old agency, is to be commended for its stress on and concern for Canadian content in radio and television, and I hope that with the new, super agency we will not slide into the kind of danger and pitfalls the American super agency has fallen into.

I have some concern about the number of full-time and part-time directors on the new board. I think the number should be increased. I know there is a heavy workload for those in the existing agencies. But, more important, I think we should have an expansion of the support staff. There are the appointed directors, but much of the real work is, of course, done by the support staff. I do not see any indication in the bill that the support staff will be increased.

Perhaps my greatest reservation about the bill, even though it is housekeeping, is the lack of provision for consumers to have a say in determining policy, especially as it relates to rate increases. One of the great criticisms consumer associations and citizens across the country had with the old Canadian Transport Commission when it came to telephone rates was that Bell Canada had its battery of lawyers and experts and could produce stacks and stacks of very technical and detailed documents, but the ordinary consumer group of a dozen individuals—or even some of the larger, national consumer groups—did not have that kind of resource background nor the finances to present their side of the story.

This has been a great weakness in our regulatory legislation and it will remain a weakness in this bill. I hope

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that in future policy, perhaps by regulation, the minister will see fit to provide moneys and support staff expertise to be available to consumer groups so that when they want to come before this new Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission on matters related to broadcasting, they will be able to present their arguments, especially on rate increases for cable television also and on other areas of policy.

We hear of the Ontario government having a royal commission on violence shown on television. It seems to me that consumer groups and citizens' groups should have direct access to the commission to present their views on matters such as advertising or violence on television. I see that as a fault in this bill. I hope that in the future we will find some provision for consumer advocacy in the field of broadcasting and telecommunications.

To reiterate, the position of the New Democratic Party is that, as a housekeeping bill, we can go along with it. Perhaps the bill says more about this government's failure or lack of progress in the field of telecommunications. I sympathize with the minister. I will not be totally negative and say he has failed, or that he should resign, because I know how difficult it is in this country to reach agreement with ten provinces and with ten ideas of what communications should be about. But if we are not making progress in conferences and in federal-provincial meetings, then for the sake of broadcasting and for the sake of national unity I suggest the minister will have to take strong action perhaps to test some of the powers in the courts which, under the constitution, the federal government has, to make it very clear to the provinces that we must move ahead and that policy must be ratified.

So we will support Bill C-5. We have expressed our reservations. We are saddened that the minister does not have more support staff and consumer advocacy bureaux for the new commission, but perhaps in the future, as Canadian citizens make their point known, the minister will move in this direction.

[Translation]

Mr. Réal Caouette (Témiscamingue): Mr. Speaker, I do not want to speak on Bill C-5 longer than is necessary, nor do I want to monopolize the time of the House, but as we know, after third reading, this bill will become law.

The bill orders a type of reorganization of Canadian radio-broadcasting and television. At the time when the minister introduced Bill C-5, some provinces were opposed to . . .

[English]

Mr. Hnatyshyn: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker, I am sorry to report that the translation system from French to English does not appear to be working. I wonder whether there could be a rectification.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: We will look into it immediately.

[Translation]

Mr. Caouette: Mr. Speaker, the sound is back. As I was saying, Bill C-5 provides for a revision or reorganization of radio-broadcasting throughout Canada. This bill is extremely important because, like most federal hon. members I feel that we should have some measure of unity in