

Supply

Government's foot intruding into the doors of the newsrooms of the daily newspapers of Canada.

In his very powerful and disturbing novel, "1984", George Orwell wrote about the way in which politicians could corrupt the English language. As well, he dealt with that subject in many of the other pieces he has written. He pointed out that often the most innocuous of terms are used by politicians to throw a veil over the most odious of actions. By co-opting language which was positive, by misusing it, by perverting the language and by making it mean something it was never intended to mean, they were able to mask actions which the public at large would refuse to accept if they were honestly presented.

● (1250)

Nowhere could there be a better example of what Orwell was referring to than for a Government, under the guise of legislation dealing with freedom of the press, ostensibly to enhance freedom of the press, to bring in measures which would make the press financially beholden to that Government, make it so that potential purchasers of news outlets would have to win the favour of the Government before they could act, and make the actions of working journalists subject to scrutiny and review by a government-sponsored and, in large part, government-appointed press council. What could be more dangerous than that? What could be a worse corruption of language than that which, in its face, seems straightforward? If Orwell were here today I think he would be amazed to find how well the Government has learned the techniques he warned about in passage after passage.

If we are to preserve the freedoms of Canadians, it is essential that we begin now to prevent any action by the Government which will chip away, erode, undermine or circumscribe those fundamental freedoms.

It should be pointed out to the Government that it is ironic that at the very same time as it laments the fact that there are fewer daily newspapers in Canada, it has made no positive proposals that would increase the number of dailies. It has not suggested changes to tax legislation which would encourage advertisers to use the newspapers. It has not proposed changes in legislation that would allow the heirs to independent daily newspapers to be able to hang on when the owner dies and so continue the ownership. Instead of spending money on direct grants to newspapers, the Government has not proposed fellowships for journalists or an increase in funding for journalism schools in the country. These were not concerns of the Government; its concern was the control of a dwindling number of dailies in Canada.

At the same time as the Minister of State for Multiculturalism complains about the shrinking number of dailies in the country, successive Ministers of Communications have done everything they could to impede the ability of Canadians to see and hear what they would like on their radio and television stations. On the one hand the Government argues that diversity is essential; on the other hand it has consistently tried to prevent that diversity.

Finally, I think I should bring to the attention of the House a statement which perhaps explains better than I can a concern that many people in Canada have about what the Government is doing. When the Minister of the Environment (Mr. Roberts) was Secretary of State, he delivered an address to the 20th General Assembly of UNESCO. He said this:

On every continent there are some people who think that governments should regulate journalists, should tell them, in the public interest, what to write, or should pass judgment on their accuracy. Canadians do not believe that either politicians or public servants should have anything to say in the management, direction or correction of the media. Quite the contrary. In their view, only a free press can guarantee that the decisions of the state power are in harmony with the wishes of the people. Governments have no means of knowing what the needs of society are for its own well being, unless they are told by an informed public.

None of us here today, Mr. Speaker, could have expressed the importance of a free and unfettered press better than did the Minister of the Environment. The onus is on Members here today to take that message to heart and resist attempts by the Government to shackle the free press that is so important to our democracy.

Mr. Breau: Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Member started off by saying—and I believe I paraphrase him correctly—that when the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) retires the rights of Canadians will have been lessened if you compare them to what they were in 1968. The Hon. Member acknowledges that I am quoting him correctly. He is either being grossly partisan or is guilty of a grave oversight. I wonder how he could say that about language rights unless he does not consider language rights to be important human and social rights.

How can the Hon. Member be so hypocritical when his Party tried for weeks and months—and buckled under the pressure of the Provinces—to resist the enshrining of a Charter of Rights in our Constitution?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Corbin): Before recognizing the Hon. Member I wish to remark that I saw him frown at the use of a certain word. That word is in both lists but nevertheless I would caution the Hon. Member for Gloucester (Mr. Breau) and all Hon. Members about the choice of words when referring to other Hon. Members.

Mr. Beatty: Mr. Speaker, I find it a novel construction by the Hon. Member that we should measure the totality of rights in Canada on the strength of what the Prime Minister did on language rights. He has shown strength on language rights in Canada but in so many other areas he has either refused to act or has circumscribed important rights.

Mr. Breau: Oh, oh!

Mr. Beatty: The Hon. Member asks a question and then attempts to drown out the answer. One of the most fundamental rights in Canada is the right to free speech in Parliament, yet the Hon. Member would try to drown me out when I answer his question.

I pointed out one of those areas. A fundamental right is a right to a free and unfettered press. We find that the Government is going in exactly the opposite direction.