

Government Orders

It goes on: "Opposition Liberal critic, Sheila Finestone, has argued forcefully that it is wrong to drop the clause when Canada's future is in doubt, but she's mistaken. Canada doesn't need a cheerleader CBC. What it does need is a CBC with enough independence to tell the truth and a government with a thick enough hide to let it be told."

On the issue of the CBC's standing committees of the board, I wish members opposite would stop using the expression, "splitting the board". What is proposed is a unifying mechanism with standing committees of the board, on which the president and the chairman would serve. That is the bridging. Those are standing committees only.

On the issue of "he who hears decides", I feel compelled to point out to my hon. friend that the bill specifically requires that members of panels consult with the commission for the purpose of ensuring consistent interpretations of broadcasting policy and regulations. This will enable panels to avoid inconsistent decision making.

The chairman selects panel members and could decide that issues of national significance, such as network licences, would be decided by a very large panel, representing the commission as a whole. Decisions affecting regulations and over-all policy matters would continue to be made by the whole commission. That should allay the concerns about Balkanization.

Mr. Geoff Scott (Hamilton—Wentworth): Mr. Speaker, at long last, I am pleased to participate in this third and final reading of Bill C-40, a major and welcome overhaul of the 1968 Broadcasting Act.

As a broadcast journalist with more than 20 years experience before I jumped from the third floor parliamentary press gallery to the floor of the House of Commons in 1978, I have listened with great care to the thoughtful contributions of my friends opposite during report stage of this debate. Indeed, sometimes I thought their interminable interventions got a might repetitive, but hon. members of both opposition parties hammered home their points with passion and eloquence.

I particularly want to pay tribute to the hon. member for Mount Royal—

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Scott (Hamilton—Wentworth): —and her cohort, the hon. member for Winnipeg St. James, and to the hon. member for Port Moody—Coquitlam, for their commitment to the preservation and strengthening of a distinctive Canadian broadcasting system.

Indeed, more and better Canadian programming designed to enrich Canadian life and, above all, to safeguard our precious Canadian identity is a goal we all share, regardless of party affiliation in the House.

No one, Sir, epitomizes the true spirit of the Canadian identity from both founding cultures' point of view than the minister in whose name this bill will soon become law, my friend, the distinguished hon. member for Frontenac. I am sure, as others have done, he would allow me to pay particular attention to the yeoman efforts of his parliamentary secretary, the hon. member for Edmonton Southwest, who laboured for months in committee and in the House to help fine-tune Bill C-40 to the flexible state it is in now and to pilot this piece of legislation to its worth-while conclusion.

Like others who have spoken in this debate, I could wax enthusiastic about all of the positive aspects of Bill C-40 which I consider to be tremendous improvements over the 1968 Broadcasting Act. We have here measures designed to bring both public and private players in the broadcasting system into line with the challenging new technological realities of the 1990s. There are measures here to portray more accurately the multicultural nature of our society and to enshrine in the legislation for the first time programming priorities for aboriginal peoples, the disabled, women, children, and cultural minorities.

Above all, I applaud the thrust of this bill to move the CBC toward more distinctively Canadian programming and especially measures to strengthen the CBC's management structure and financial accountability to Parliament. For obvious reasons, Sir, I am delighted that this bill guarantees the journalistic freedoms and artistic independence of the CBC.

• (2010)

There is so much good stuff in this new Broadcasting Act that time will not permit me to dwell at length on the merits which the Minister of Communications and others have so eloquently set forth in this debate.