

Canadian Broadcasting Act

It would raise doubt and confusion on every day in the week as to whether or not legal business could be transacted, as far as bills of exchange, cheques and promissory notes were concerned. The present bill is regarded by the Department of Finance and the banks as the only possible practical one to permit the five-day week.

Mr. Knowles: If this bill is put through, do I take it that it means that while it permits the banks to close on Saturdays, it does not permit them to close some other day in lieu of Saturday?

Mr. Sinclair: That is quite right.

Section agreed to.

Title agreed to.

Bill reported.

Mr. Speaker: When shall the bill be read the third time?

Mr. Fournier (Hull): Now, by leave.

Mr. Fulton: Next sitting.

Mr. Fournier (Hull): Next sitting.

Mr. Speaker: Next sitting of the house.

CANADIAN BROADCASTING ACT

AMENDMENT TO INCREASE NUMBER OF GOVERNORS, PROVIDE PENSIONS AND FURTHER GRANTS

Hon. J. J. McCann (Minister of National Revenue) moved the second reading of Bill No. 17, to amend the Canadian Broadcasting Act, 1936.

He said: As I explained at the resolution stage, the main purpose of this bill is to give effect to recommendations of the Massey commission regarding broadcasting, that is recommendations involving legislation in the form of amendments to the Canadian Broadcasting Act.

The chief feature of the bill is the provision for new revenue arrangements for the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation in line with the recommendation of the commission. It provides for the payment to the corporation of a fixed sum of \$6,250,000 each year for a period of five years. It is estimated that these payments, together with receipts from receiving set license fees and from commercial operations, will bring the annual revenues of the corporation to about the equivalent of one dollar per head of the population of Canada. This was the amount which in the opinion of the commission would be needed by the national broadcasting system to maintain its services and to carry out some necessary improvements in the five-year period.

[Mr. Sinclair.]

It has been suggested by one hon. member that the payments should not be set now by statute for a five-year period, but should be voted annually by parliament. The chief argument for such an annual vote seemed to be that it would provide parliament each year with an opportunity to review the affairs of the C.B.C. I should like to say that I for one am quite in favour of frequent reviews by parliament of broadcasting matters and the affairs of the corporation. I think it is a good thing that every year, or every year that it sees fit, this house appoints a committee for this purpose. With the appointment of such committees there is ample opportunity for discussion by the whole house of C.B.C. activities and aims. But I believe there are two strong arguments against an annual vote of money for the C.B.C. The first, I think, was well put by the royal commission in its report when it said:

There are, however, serious objections to an annual grant to be voted by parliament. Although other essential government services depend on an annual vote, it is so important to keep the national radio free from the possibility of political influence that its income should not depend annually on direct action by the government of the day.

An important matter of principle is involved here, one with which I thought hon. members on the opposite side of the house would agree. They have stated they are in agreement with us on insistence that the activities of the C.B.C. should not come under the direct influence of the government of the day. Under the provisions of the bill before the house there would be no question of the government having an influence on the broadcasting of the C.B.C. through power of proposing votes of money for operating purposes each year. As I say, however, I believe that, although the payments to the corporation from public funds will not be voted annually, parliament will still have plenty of opportunity to examine the affairs of the corporation which is directly responsible to it, and should do so.

The second reason for setting the fixed sum for a period of five years is that it will enable the corporation to make proper plans on a reasonable long term basis. When the corporation was set up by parliament it was with the idea that it should manage its affairs on a businesslike basis, following as closely as possible the methods of private operation, as is necessary in the field of broadcasting. To operate in a businesslike way the corporation needs to be able to make a good estimate of its income ahead of time, and then plan its activities and manage its affairs accordingly. I do not think broadcasting is the kind of activity for which estimates of funds can be worked out each year in the same way as