

Broadcasting Act

I commend the hon. member for St. John's East for wanting all commercials banned from children's programs. Of course, we must clearly define what are children's programs. The advertising industry contention that it will go bankrupt without children's advertising is a red herring. I contend that advertising should be directed at parents, who can determine if a toy is suitable for a child. These advertisements should be shown in the later evening hours and not on children's shows.

I repeat, it is important to refer the subject matter of this bill to committee so we can point out to the officials of the CRTC that the commission, on relying on the industry to regulate itself, is copping out and avoiding its responsibilities. I commend the hon. member for St. John's East and the hon. member for Cochrane for expressing the sentiment that once parliament has made a decision, that decision should be upheld by the regulatory body concerned. Let us refer this matter to committee as soon as possible.

[Translation]

Miss Monique Bégin (Saint-Michel): Mr. Speaker, the issue raised by the hon. member for St. John's East (Mr. McGrath), that of preventing advertising on children's programs is too important and far reaching to be opposed without explanation. I feel compelled to retrace briefly the history of the problem, of the hon. member's action on the subject and of the real issue, at which is directed Bill C-211. The need to speak is still more compelling in the light of remarks made before me by other members this evening.

As early as the winter of 1970, parents' movements initiated protests against massive TV advertising promoting Christmas gifts. The sit-in held in the CRTC's Montreal office by the "Mouvement pour l'abolition de la publicité aux enfants" is still remembered. In Toronto or Vancouver, similar groups held meetings to protest misleading advertising, or over-stimulating advertising messages to children. Those groups were following similar reactions by American consumer groups, in the light of Ralph Nader's theories against "consumerism" and other theories on the urge to consume or the consumer society.

The CRTC immediately had its research branch follow up on the situation and open a file on the subject. Later, in the spring of 1971, the hon. member for St. John's East, at the request of a number of people, introduced a private bill on the matter. He regularly reintroduced it until the present Bill C-211. He deserves commendation for his perseverance. Such is surely one of the main features of the bill. On the other hand, a number of us have been concerned with the problem before being elected or since then.

Last year, more exactly in the spring of 1973, the Standing Committee on Broadcasting, Films and Assistance to the Arts worked on a similar bill, as was recalled by the two hon. members who spoke immediately before me, and heard people from all over Canada. Those presenting evidence represented the groups involved, the university people concerned with the problem, and certain of the industries aimed at, so to speak, by the bill. Further, the government regulating body, the CRTC, gave remarkable evidence at the committee hearings of July 5, 1973, to be precise. However, I deeply regret the protective and tradi-

tionalistic attitude of our committee which did not have the good judgment of consulting those primarily concerned, parents who did not belong to those pressure groups, had perhaps a more objective view of the issue, and particularly children. Obviously that would have required a different and more flexible form of consultation, less authoritarian perhaps than that normally followed by the standing committees of the House.

Mr. McGrath: Surely you do not believe that!

Miss Bégin: I believe it wholeheartedly, to answer my colleague in the opposition, because I was a teacher for a good many years and I like children very much. I intend to deal with that in a little while. The real problem in this overall matter is far from being limited to television advertising.

The problem behind this bill is a moral problem since the bill indicts the world consumer society in its most stupid manifestation—publicity. This is indeed what I believe, Mr. Speaker, and I think it is also on this premise that you propose such a private bill.

We discussed it quite often in committee. I am going to change slightly the threads of my speech to take into account the remarks of the hon. member. We also had a lot of discussions in committee about potential reactions to publicity that has been fraudulent, that may be still too massive and too frequent and that is certainly very often completely stupid.

I shall add that the things it tries to represent are stupid, except for candies and breakfast foods, whose inherent quality is simply to exist and which cannot be labelled as stupid. I mean that toys which every winter, before Christmas, are the cause of renewed interest against publicity directed at children are of little intellectual value, compared with toys we had before in our society. This may be also why parents were made aware only three or four years ago of the television publicity directed at children.

I shall add that it is very easy to criticize the regulatory body that decided in 1971, if I am right, to encourage the Canadian Broadcasters' Association to define and apply a so-called voluntary code of ethics for its members.

It is very easy to criticize the CRTC which since last September, considers the most recently revised version of this code as part of its own standards but which has not regulated itself, in the legal meaning of the word, television advertising for children. But this is not the purpose of the bill before us; its aim is more precisely to banish and phase out publicity directed at children.

I shall say that our committee never studied the crux of the matter which is the economic facet of this issue. Since a while ago, we have been particularly negative as concerns our government agencies but our own committee did not define what would be the cost of a basic change.

Everyone knows that television in our country, including children's programs, is very often extraordinary. The French network of the CBC was once considered to make—and I must unfortunately say this in the past tense—the best children's programs in the world. These programs are supported by an economic base which is the

[Mr. Symes.]