

Non-Canadian Publications

● (1650)

Many government members felt that once they were able to give a last-minute reprieve to *Reader's Digest*, all members of this House and Canadians in general would be pleased with the result and Bill C-58 would receive speedy passage through the House. The government is now surprised to find that some people who believe in principles do not like back-room deals. The government is finding out that in spite of the fact *Reader's Digest* feels it can continue to function, we are not accepting a contents regulation.

During my two previous interventions in this debate I said I did not in any way like the content rule or percentages in that context, but at least I can support this amendment for the simple reason that we would have the regulations written into the law. I commend the hon. member for Vancouver Kingsway for having the courage, as a member of the government, to say that there should be absolutely no content control by virtue of Bill C-58 or by virtue of any regulation passed by the minister or officials of the Department of National Revenue. Her amendment has my support.

It is interesting to note the government hoped that by getting this legislation passed very quickly after the recess, it would not attract too much editorial comment. It is interesting to note that in general the newspapers of Canada are not supportive of the *Reader's Digest* deal. This whole question goes far beyond the existence of one magazine. While that may be the focal point at this juncture, the critical question for us, as members of parliament, and for Canadians in general is whether any government or any minister of the Crown should have the power, through legislation or regulation, to control the press. I am sure that government members will immediately argue that this does not involve control of the press. However, as soon as a content rule is brought in, a certain amount of press control becomes the fact of life.

I also find it exceedingly strange that the NDP, which likes to clothe itself in the righteous cloaks of civil libertarians, has remained silent about this amendment. If a so-called left wing magazine were threatened by government legislation or a back-room deal, I wonder if we would see every NDP member moving amendments and subamendments one after another. They are strangely silent on this amendment.

Mr. Peters: We never consider *Time* a socialist magazine.

Mr. Epp: That is not what I was saying, and if the hon. member had been listening he would know the difference.

An hon. Member: We are listening.

Mr. Peters: I don't find it either right-wing or left-wing.

Mr. Epp: I wonder if the hon. member wants to make a speech from a seat other than his own.

An hon. Member: We want to listen. We are trying to get some wisdom from what you are saying.

Mr. Epp: The NDP, supposedly the proponents of Canadian nationalism—by their own definition I might add, which has been rejected time after time by the Canadian electorate—is now strangely quiet. We have

[Mr. Epp.]

legislation which goes to the very root of civil liberties, yet members of that party have nothing to say. By saying nothing, I suppose one could assume they are in favour of the legislation. I suppose the only civil liberties they believe in are those they advocate for their own support. That is not a principle but a cheap political move. They obviously think this is not fighting ground for them and they should abandon the field to come back and fight another day when they have something to fight about.

No contents legislation or regulation should be supported by this House or by Canadians generally. I might suggest that if the whips were not doing their job it would not be supported by a number of government members. This amendment lends itself to the support of every member of this House. The amendment retains the ownership provision, that is, the 75 per cent rule. I am sure every member of the House can agree with that. It also retains the provision that editing will be done in Canada, that the publication functions will be retained in Canada and performed by Canadians. That is where it stops. If the House were debating a bill in that form, I am sure it would have been passed through the House long ago.

What the government has tried to do is close the door still further. This would have eliminated *Time* magazine and would have been in support of the Canadian Periodicals' Association. Time and time again supporters of that association stressed the fact that 80 per cent "not substantially the same" was the absolute minimum with which it could live. In fact, that association wanted 100 per cent. These supposedly great writers of Canada were saying they could not compete with the rest of the world. They asked for complete control of the industry through a 100 per cent rule in order that they might compete. They were very gracious in their concessions and dropped from 100 per cent to 80 per cent.

The regulations as interpreted for the purpose of *Reader's Digest* and the so-called deal have not changed. The application of the word "digest" to the rule is now being viewed differently, and that is the whole essence of this debate. Even before Bill C-58 passes through the House, the minister has changed his interpretation and the Secretary of State (Mr. Faulkner) has had to agree. I imagine the Secretary of State takes the low road home every day now. He has had to concede to this change in interpretation. I do not know what other changes will take place after the ten ministers return from the province of British Columbia. I understand they are being absolutely decimated by the arguments of the lumber association and other people in British Columbia to the effect that Bill C-58 not only is regressive and wrong but it will not achieve the purpose it is supposed to achieve, and will be counterproductive. It will result in a backlash from their best neighbour, the United States.

● (1700)

Having passed the ownership clause, why must the government insist on going further in respect of content? Not one good reason has been given for this. What the government hopes to accomplish is that editorials will be such that they will be able to survive. The other day the hon. member for Sault Ste. Marie (Mr. Symes), when I quoted from the *Toronto Sun* called it a progressive paper. I commend him for his insight.