

Broadcasting Guidelines

The hon. member for St. John's East has indicated that the bill as such cannot go to a committee where it can be scrutinized. In view of its importance, I believe that the subject matter of the bill should go to committee where it can be scrutinized and the evidence heard.

I speak now personally and sincerely as a private member of this House, not as House leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition. This bill should go to a place where evidence, expert and lay, of parents and others, can be examined. May I say that I am profoundly grateful to my hon. friend from Restigouche, who is not a member of my party—which indicates the importance of this piece of legislation—for agreeing to second an amendment to this motion. I therefore move, seconded by the hon. member for Restigouche:

That Bill C-229, an act to amend the Broadcasting Act (guidelines respecting portrayal of sex and violence) be not now read a second time but that it be withdrawn and the order discharged, and the subject matter thereof be referred to the Standing Committee on Broadcasting, Films and Assistance to the Arts.

I move this amendment so that the subject matter of this bill can go to the place in this institution where it can be dealt with in detail. This action has occurred three times previously in the House. It occurred on Bill C-220, the Federal Transport Commission of Inquiry Act. It occurred on Bill C-221 having to do with the Criminal Code and the abduction of children. It happened with respect to Bill C-208, to amend the Criminal Code, which involved the provision of humane trapping equipment for animals—all of them private members' bills. If we owe that duty to animals and to transportation, then I say that we owe it to children as well.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton): It is on that basis that I move this amendment.

● (1630)

Mr. Jim Fleming (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Fisheries and the Environment): Mr. Speaker, I shall be very brief. When I was asked to speak in this debate I did not know I would rise at this particular point. I regret that, and I speak most sincerely. When the hon. member for St. John's East (Mr. McGrath) first stood, he made it clear that he understands the responsibilities faced by the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Communications (Mr. Milne), and I do as well.

If I may, I should like to spend approximately three or four minutes making several points. As a member of the Standing Committee on Broadcasting, Films and Assistance to the Arts, and as a vice chairman at one point, I have worked with the hon. member for St. John's East. I have attended meetings which were held in his office. Also, I have viewed material put together by the hon. member which indicated some of the problems that are being created for our young people.

I have some problem with the actual form of the bill, but I believe the hon. member for St. John's East made it clear that that was not the essence of what he wanted to talk about, nor why he put it forward. He believes there should be a thorough

and thoughtful discussion of this problem. He has felt that for some time, and so have I, as I am sure others have in this House. I support his desire for that discussion. If that discussion is to take place and have proper effect, it must take place here as part of parliament's responsibility and not under some other jurisdiction which does not have those responsibilities.

It is possible to be very philosophical about the pendulum of society and society's mores. If you swing in a certain direction and you go a little too far, then the pendulum swings back. I find myself in something of a dilemma because how can we have too much freedom? You can have too much of what some people may call freedom and deny people what freedom should represent. It should represent a fair and humane society and not a society which twists young minds and misguides them about the society in which they are growing up.

As a journalist for the best part of my adult life before entering parliament, I was against censorship and very much in favour of freedom of information. As the situation regarding pornography has shown us lately, total freedom can lead to very perverse situations—situations which threaten the society we want to improve upon. Sick and perverse material is available now, including youngsters in it, and that material should not be available to juveniles in stores across our country. As well, I believe adults should have total freedom. But when material is available to them which makes them behave in an unnatural and abnormal way, then I believe perhaps that material should not be available to them.

At the very best, we are not sure if there is a direct effect on children. At the very worst, there is a direct effect from sex and violence on television. If that is the case it should be discussed with those who have the power under our laws to regulate the industry. It should be discussed also with those who act under our laws and the people of the country whose children and themselves may be affected by it.

I realize other hon. members wish to speak on this subject, but time is passing and we cannot afford to let the situation continue and wonder why. At the time this bill was introduced in parliament by the hon. member, I was proud to have seconded it. I believe the time is here for us to get down to a thorough and thoughtful consideration. I do not believe in censorship, but we must do something to protect our children and stop what is happening at the moment.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Bruce Halliday (Oxford): Mr. Speaker, originally I had not intended to speak this afternoon on this bill introduced by the hon. member for St. John's East (Mr. McGrath), but I am impressed by the sincerity which he brings to this debate and the very interesting documentation he has received from the American Medical Association to support the bill. I appreciate the dilemma the parliamentary secretary is in, in not being in a position to allow this bill to come to a vote tonight.

I congratulate my House leader, the hon. member for Grenville-Carleton (Mr. Baker), for having the wisdom to present his amendment which, if it is passed, will allow us to discuss this subject matter in committee.