

Government Orders

Gerry Caplan, testifying before a House committee said:

We have a broadcasting system that, when most Canadians are watching it each night, feeds them a daily diet of predominantly, indeed overwhelmingly American programming in the name of meeting the objectives of the Broadcast Act.

The Standing Committee on Communications and Culture, which my friend, the parliamentary secretary, chaired, stated:

The Committee considers it evident that private television has been making an insufficient contribution—The private sector is earning 50 per cent return on investment.

The brief of ACTRA also suggested that there were good profits, but not enough Canadian content.

The government's response to the private sector, which in television especially is making significant profits using the public airways and yet not doing its job in producing Canadian programs, is minimal. They have ignored the task force in broadcasting which called for 45 per cent Canadian content between 7 and 11 p.m. The only response in this bill is found in clause 11 where the government proposes to the CRTC the possibility of a performance incentive. It laid out how that scheme would work in their policy document, *Canadian Voices, Canadian Choices*, which it tabled with the bill.

There has not been a single witness before the legislative committee on either one of these two bills who thinks this scheme will work. Not the unions, not ACTRA or CUPE, not the private sector, Western International Communications, Canadian Association of Broadcasters, and so on—and not the commission. Nobody. At best, they all said it would be little more than a licensing fee.

We have a scheme here. I will call it performance incentive. No one supports it, but it is still in the bill. My amendment here would specifically in this timeframe require a percentage of Canadian content. I suggest that is the way to go.

• (1710)

The motion is also necessary because the commission has refused to get tough with the private sector on content issues. Despite this appalling record of promises broken, the condition of licence is not lived up to by private broadcasters. I challenge anyone to find a private

sector broadcaster whose licence has been revoked by the CRTC. There is not one.

The Standing Committee on Communications and Culture doubted the commission would ever revoke a licence. It stated: "We do not believe that the commission will in fact suspend the licence of a network broadcaster". This is why we need an explicit direction in this legislation.

This amendment reflects the spirit of many briefs to the legislative committee and the Caplan-Sauvageau report. If private broadcasters are forced to present Canadian programs in prime time, they will have no choice in my view but to produce quality programs in order to gain advertising revenue. This is the thrust of this amendment. I think members should support it.

Mr. Ronald J. Duhamel (St. Boniface): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to stand today to address the proposed amendments to the broadcast bill, Bill C-40, specifically the predominantly Canadian content and the role of the National Film Board. The predominantly Canadian content and an important role for the National Film Board are the two critical issues.

Before I get into a precise argument with respect to those amendments, I do want to point out that I obviously have a number of other concerns about this bill. I am quite certain that the new definition will be challenged and clearly the most important question being raised is whether or not there will be a federal role for communications as a result of what is happening.

There is concern as well with the regionalization of services and whether or not there will be a number of fiefdoms that will be created that will further weaken the country. Those are concerns that need to be raised because they are clearly extremely legitimate.

The whole notion of separating the English and the French is one where I have personally mixed feelings because clearly I would have believed and I wanted to believe, if there was one level of government that could have institutions where those two groups could work in harmony together and synergize, it would be at the federal level. I suspect that this is probably being done because there is some unhappiness. There is something at work there that is not positive at this particular point in time, otherwise it would not be doing it.