

Hon. Norman K. Atkins: Honourable senators, I am prepared to withdraw the motion. I would be interested in knowing whether we can then vote on the committee report.

Senator Frith: I cannot prevent us from doing that. If leave is asked to withdraw the motion to amend the report because of the objection as to its orderliness, and it is therefore withdrawn, then the motion is before us. I cannot stop us from voting on that.

Senator Atkins: Honourable senators, with leave of the Senate, I wish to withdraw my motion.

Senator Frith: Because of the objection as to its being in order?

Senator Atkins: Yes.

Senator Frith: Then leave should be granted.

The Hon. the Speaker pro tempore: Honourable senators, is leave granted?

Some Hon. Senators: Agreed.

Motion in amendment withdrawn.

MOTION FOR ADOPTION OF SEVENTH REPORT NEGATIVED

The Hon. the Speaker pro tempore: Honourable senators, it is moved by the Honourable Senator MacDonald (Halifax), seconded by the Honourable Senator Poitras, that this report be adopted.

Is it your pleasure, honourable senators, to adopt the motion?

Hon. Royce Frith (Deputy Leader of the Opposition): The motion is now before us and I should like to speak briefly on it.

Technically, of course, Senator Atkins needs leave to speak to it now, because, by moving his motion in amendment, he has spoken to it. However, I shall not insist on that if he wants to say something, especially if he wants to explain why he is against national unity.

Hon. Norman K. Atkins: Honourable senators, once again, I should like to speak directly to this bill. Bill C-40 is a result of perhaps the most comprehensive and public review of broadcasting policy ever undertaken in Canada. The bill has been more than five years in the making and has twice been passed in the other place. Along the way, the bill has been the subject of wide-ranging public debate and comment and even some adjustments. It has twice passed second reading in the Senate.

The review of broadcasting policy produced two unanimous conclusions. The 1968 Broadcasting Act is outdated and the choice of Canadian programming is inadequate. The Broadcasting Act urgently needs updating to encompass new technologies not covered by the existing Broadcasting Act, to ensure the CRTC's authority to manage the broadcasting system effectively, and to reflect social realities such as human rights concerns and the need for better representation of women and minorities in our broadcasting system. In addition, there is a need to put in place new legislative provisions to help ensure that more and better Canadian programming choices

[Senator Frith.]

are available to all Canadians, if our cultural sovereignty is to be protected and strengthened.

● (1220)

This legislation addresses these issues. It is the result of a genuine consensus and I believe it is time that it become law.

The first amendment relates to the CBC and national unity. Senator Stewart spoke about this amendment yesterday. Bill C-40 alters the CBC's mandate under the existing Broadcasting Act by replacing an obligation to contribute to the development of national unity with an obligation to contribute to the shared national consciousness and identity. This new wording recognizes the important role that the CBC can and should play in helping Canadians understand their country and each other. At the same time, it fully respects the CBC's journalistic independence and integrity.

In considering this issue, an all-party committee of the other house concluded unanimously that there must be no suggestion in the act that the CBC has any obligation to serve as a propagandist, even for a cause as legitimate as national unity. I believe that this was, and remains, the right conclusion. I believe also that it is important and constructive to note that this view has been supported by the majority of witnesses who have appeared before the committees of both houses of Parliament which have studied this bill, including witnesses from the CBC and the Friends of Canadian Broadcasting.

In my view, we should stay with this new wording rather than amend the bill to restate words which have been seen as problematic by the Caplan-Sauvageau Task Force, the Standing Committee on Communications and Culture of the other house, the two legislative committees of the other house, the senior management of the CBC, the past-chairman of the CRTC, and the foremost historian of Canadian broadcasting policy, Professor Frank Peers.

It is interesting to note that during his appearance before the Senate committee Professor Peers captured well the concerns of several other witnesses. Responding to questions on this issue, he suggested that an objective of contributing to the development of national unity places unreal expectations on the mandate of a public broadcaster because the phrase "national unity" may refer to particular constitutional arrangements which can alter over time. He supported the new wording in the bill because, in his view, broadcasters should be expected to do what they do best, which is to reflect and represent society as it is.

Honourable senators, the new wording refocuses the CBC mandate somewhat without taking away the responsibilities of the national public broadcaster to provide a responsible service to Canadians. Clearly, the CBC should be expected to help build this country as best a public broadcaster can, by reporting as accurately, honestly and objectively as it can, and by helping Canadians in all regions to share in our diverse culture and heritage. That is the mandate that this legislation gives to the CBC.