

Broadcasting Act

Instead, the Government has done very little. The Government states in Clause 3(h) that:

a range of broadcasting services in English and French should be extended to all Canadians as resources become available;

That is not very specific. It states that these services should be available, rather than making clear there is an entitlement to them, as a matter of right. Obviously these services must be provided as resources become available, but I thought there would be some urgency on that issue. It is very vague with respect to the regions.

The clause states that the CBC should reflect Canadians to the nation and the regions to themselves. It has also been relegated as a minor function for the alternative service, to reflect Canada, the regions and its multicultural nature.

The committee was clear that the regions ought to be in the system for the nation as a whole as well as reflecting the region to itself so that people would get the full services in their areas as well as the programming from their own area.

What is the reason for this disappointing situation? The rumour is that the Government had better legislation and would have gone further with the recommendations of the Standing Committee on Communications and Culture, but the draft measures were sent to the trade negotiation office and were vetoed by the American Government. That is the rumour I heard. I would like to see what clauses landed on the cutting room floor and for the Minister to show us what she had planned. While we have come a long way in developing our culture, we have not stopped developing in terms of our artistic qualities, our character and the contribution Canadians can make to the world. We need all of the resources at our disposal to see that our talents and our contribution is developed.

There are measures in Bill C-136 that reflect the free trade agreement. It is one of the first casualties of the free trade agreement. The Government is stating through this Bill that it does not have confidence in Canadians to move forward. Not only will we stay still, we may even move back in some respects. That shows a lack of confidence in Canadians that I do not share.

Our culture has made enormous strides. Different sections have developed at a different pace. It is wrong that we will not even have the tools to develop in the future. As Simon Reisman said, only those measures that are consistent with the free trade deal will go ahead to help develop Canadian culture. He was confident that there were many measures consistent with the free trade deal that could be taken. But the point is that we should not be asking permission to implement our own measures. We should not have a piece of legislation that ties our hands. Instead of making decisions about what is good for Canada, Canada's regions or Canada's cultural community, we first have to ask if this legislation is consistent with the deal we tied ourselves into in 1988. That is a shameful situation to be in, and I think that the far better approach would be to say that we will keep our ability to make decisions.

• (1130)

Let us have confidence in our artists, broadcasters, writers and performers. Let us see to it that the public's airwaves are used for this dynamic expression of Canadian culture. Let us keep all the legislative tools we need to develop policies to protect and promote Canadian culture in broadcasting and in all of the other sectors we would want to protect and enhance in the future.

If the film distribution Bill was the first cultural casualty of the free trade agreement, this broadcasting Bill is the second cultural casualty of the free trade agreement. There will be others in other areas of life as well. I think this is extremely unfortunate, particularly when our culture is booming. We have an enormous amount of talent and we should be supporting and enhancing that talent at this stage. We should not be looking back, freezing the situation where it is now. We should have confidence and we should look toward the future.

I am extremely disappointed about having to talk about this Bill on second reading stage, approval in principle. I have worked on this subject for years. I participated in the hearings held across Canada by the Standing Committee on Communications and Culture, a committee that did listen to Canadians. The Bill reflects a Minister who did not listen to Canadians. It reflects the influence of the trade negotiations office which has certainly not listened to Canadians.

If we were listening to Canadians, we would be having an election right now on all of these issues. I look forward to that election. In the meantime, I am very disappointed that now, in the middle of summer, the Government is pushing forward such a broadcasting Bill. This is one of the few opportunities we have every couple of decades to look seriously at broadcasting and to plan for the future. The Government is missing that opportunity. Instead, it is tying Canadians' hands for the future because it would rather pursue Ronald Reagan's vision of a North American market. It would rather deny the opportunity for us Canadians to develop our own culture as a part of our very exciting Canadian society.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Questions or comments? Debate.

Mr. Roger Clinch (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Communications): Mr. Speaker, it is with a great deal of pleasure that I would like to enter into this debate. The new broadcast Bill, Bill C-136, will ensure the continued strength of the broadcasting system and the continued presence of competitive Canadian programming. Accordingly, I am pleased to have this opportunity to speak in favour of the Bill.

We would have the impression from the Hon. Member who just spoke that this Bill has been greeted with only negative reactions. I think Hon. Members would be very interested to know that there have been some very positive reactions. If you would permit me to do so, Mr. Speaker, I would like to quote the words of some of the more recognized newspapers and groups in Canada which have been very pleased by the Minister's new broadcast Bill.