

Government Orders

Broadcasters are the persons licensed to make programming decisions. It would seriously undermine the accountability expected from broadcasters to authorize unlicensed entities, however worthy, and to make use of the broadcasting system as a legislatively mandated outlet for their work.

[Translation]

Mr. Phillip Edmonston (Chambly): Mr. Speaker, I also would like to support Motions Nos. 8 and 9 to amend this bill, especially because as a member from Quebec, I think it is extremely important to have Canadian content in CBC programming. However, I am prepared to go even further, Mr. Speaker. I think it is essential, if we agree that we should have Canadian content in our programming, to include in our programming policy a preference for a French news network that would broadcast on a continuous basis, what in English is called an all news network or all news programming. We don't have this yet in French. My French-speaking colleagues are no doubt aware of the fact that this kind of programming exists in English but not in French. And when we talk about Quebec as a distinct society, why is Quebec distinct? It is distinct because French is spoken, because we have a French culture, because our laws are different, being based on the Civil Code. That is why, when we are talking about content, we must provide a framework for this content in the form of an all news network in French.

I see here in the House some of my friends who are also former journalists with the electronic media, and they know very well that the general public is extremely interested in the news. That is why, the all news network, all news programming, is so popular among Anglophones. The News World Network is very popular, but in Quebec no such service exists. In other words, this type of service is extremely important.

However, there are other reasons why I feel Canadian content is important when setting up an all news network in French. Now that the government is adopting or imposing legislation to introduce the goods and services tax, better known as the GST, people will read fewer books, and some people have said that book sales will drop by 25 per cent. This means that if Canada has an illiteracy rate that varies between 25 and 28 per cent,

more and more people will get their information from news broadcasts on radio and especially on television.

• (1750)

I entirely agree with the focus of Motions Nos. 8 and 9, which is to increase Canadian content, but I think this should start with an all-news network in French to meet the needs of Quebecers and French-speaking Canadians who want to know what is going on in the world and Canada, and want to hear it in French. This is very important.

Here again, Mr. Speaker, I must say that although I am in favour of Canadian content with an all-news network in French as a starting point, I feel some concern that the news may be biased and lack objectivity. Why? Because Radio-Canada may become compelled to act according to criteria that disturb me, and I am referring to the one about national unity we find in the bill.

I am all for national unity, and I imagine my colleagues are as well. We are all in favour of national unity. Members here in Ottawa are all in favour. As a former journalist, I worked for Radio-Canada in Quebec City for three years, in French, and I worked in English at CFCF, as the hon. member is aware. I also worked at the Gazette as a columnist and, finally, I worked at CKVL Radio in Montreal. That a bill should contain a clause that includes promoting national unity as part of the mandate of a network like Radio-Canada, gives me the shivers. Not because I am against Canadian unity but because I am a journalist. I think I understand what people, like my Liberal colleagues want to do. They want to make this dream come true of Canadians living in harmony from coast to coast. That will never happen! There will always be dynamic tension between West and East and between Anglophones and Francophones. That is only normal. That is what Canada is about. It is a little like political parties that get splintered. This is a pretty accurate analogy of the fragmentation of our society into West and East, Francophones and Anglophones.

It is not necessarily a bad thing. In fact it is positive. That is why I think the Canadian content rule is very good, and I agree it is important, but I have some reservations about promoting Canadian unity. As a journalist, I feel that the main objective of a news broadcast should be to present the news honestly, clearly, accurately and quickly.