

CRTC Act

Frankly, in the case of CTV, its efforts are almost negligible in that particular area.

Mr. Taylor: Mr. Speaker, during the last Parliament there was a lot of discussion across the country about pornography. Some stations were applying to supply programs such as Playboy, which were very distasteful to the vast majority of Canadians. At that time, I sent representations to the then Minister of Communications. The answer I received every time was that the Minister generally agreed with what the people were saying, but that he had no authority. We had the situation in which an appointed board was overruling a Minister of the Crown. I thought it a very odd situation that an elected member of the Government would have to take orders from an appointed body. I would like to ask the Hon. Member, in a case where there is dispute over content, such as pornography, who should have the final say, the CRTC or the Minister representing the Government of Canada?

Mr. Cassidy: Mr. Speaker, again I think that is a good question and it is one which is difficult to answer. Of course, in our system the courts have the final say, if it is a matter of pornography, in the legal sense. I have some difficulty in answering where one goes beyond that. However, I believe that the Bill here would clearly empower the Government of the day to step in and, I would say hopefully, on a general rather than on a specific basis to decide that it is the wisdom of the Government of the day that the CRTC should get tougher on pornography and obscenity or, for that matter, it should loosen up the screws, because I think, really, things are becoming a bit ridiculous. I cannot help but remember the Hon. Member for Calgary North (Mr. Gagnon) who came up with a statement today at two o'clock in order to deliver a paean of praise to profit and the profit motive. Of course, all that the people from Playboy would be guilty of, in his opinion, would be the fact that they were trying to make a profit. I am sure the Hon. Member for Bow River (Mr. Taylor) is in favour of that as well. One has to be careful because principles can conflict from time to time on issues such as this.

● (1600)

I do question whether a directive should go from the Government of the day to tell CTV not to run a particular show or to tell First Choice not to carry the Playboy channel, and so on, because I think with that kind of meddling we would get very quickly into a situation where in fact it would be the Government, not a commission at arm's length from Government, which would be making decisions which would affect the actual program content of particular TV stations. That kind of political interference with the media is something I would have to question seriously.

Mr. Taylor: Mr. Speaker, I do not think the Hon. Member really answered my question. In my view, where there is a dispute, surely the Government of the day should have the authority to settle it. The Government must take the responsibility, particularly with a Crown corporation. When we go outside of that, it may be a different problem.

I would also like to pose a question in connection with Canadian content. I have found that the cable company in part of my riding was subjected to severe criticism by CRTC for showing some American programs. However, the people of that area wanted those American programs. The only way the cable company could stay on the air was to give them the American programs. The same programs could be heard in Ottawa and Toronto and in all the big centres, but because it was a rural area, my constituents were being denied a chance to see the programs they wanted to see. I want to emphasize, along with what the Hon. Member for Ottawa Centre (Mr. Cassidy) said, that the people of the country should have some say in this. When the people of the country want certain programs then, surely, that should be the prime criterion. The people of the country are the ones we should be serving and when we have a majority of our people wanting certain programs and someone in CRTC or the Government says "No, no, we will tell you what's good for you. You can't have that at all", then we are getting pretty close to the type of government they have in Moscow, not the kind I want in Canada.

Mr. Cassidy: Mr. Speaker, I find myself in agreement with the Hon. Member and in fundamental disagreement with him at the same time. His first argument was that his constituents should at least be able to get the same range of programming which is available in, say, Calgary, Edmonton, Toronto or Montreal. Given modern technology, that is feasible. The Hon. Member asked why on earth should they not have that rather than being confined to receiving CTV and CBC and not much else. That is a very reasonable request, and I agree with it.

However, the Hon. Member then proceeded to suggest that it is the duty of his Government to open the air waves in Canada to all kinds of trash from the United States, completely to submerge this country, which has stayed independent for about 124 years from our neighbour to the south, in such a bath of American pop culture and beyond that in fact any sense of Canadian identity would be completely submerged.

I cannot agree with that, Mr. Speaker, because I happen to be proud of being a Canadian and I happen to find that there are distinctive values and attributes to our life here in Canada which I want to see preserved. Our communication organizations and broadcasting networks are very important to me in maintaining a Canadian identity, and I would hate to see the Hon. Member getting together with members of his Party to do what he seems to want to do.

Perhaps I can say a final word. One of the problems of government these days is that governments have too much on their plate. That is one of the reasons why a Crown agency is set up. I would caution the Hon. Member against selling within his Party a doctrine that the Minister of Communications should second guess all decisions of the CRTC, because if the Minister of Communications and the Government decided to do that, they would never have time to do anything else.

Mr. Taylor: Mr. Speaker—