

*Broadcasting Act*

**Mr. Ernie Epp (Thunder Bay—Nipigon):** Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to say something about Bill C-136, the Broadcasting Act, which the Government brought forward for debate in these last days of July. I think it is appropriate to say that it is a real shame to be debating this matter now. Broadcasting is one of the most important issues that could possibly be put before the country as it relates to culture and society and understanding ourselves. Broadcasting is absolutely central to culture in our time. To have a Bill, which will play such an important part in determining how the broadcasting system evolves over the next decade or two, brought forward for debate in July when there is not as much readiness to debate carefully and critically, seems to me fits in with the Government's agenda of moving things along with not as much critical attention as should be given in order to gloss over the shortcomings of legislation.

I am therefore pleased this morning that there is critical attention being given to these matters and I hope others will come into the debate and continue the exploration necessary at second reading to determine whether the Government has met the challenge or to clarify the extent to which it has fallen short.

I listened with great interest to the comments of my friend, the Hon. Member for Winnipeg North (Mr. Orlikow), as he debated a variety of shortcomings in the Government's practices and in Bill C-136. I ask those who are listening to take those as a given for my own sense of the situation. I want to expand particularly on one area which, of necessity, has had limited attention in much of the debate, and that is the question of how adequately this Bill recognizes the multicultural policy of the country stated in this Parliament almost 17 years ago, and to which we have in this Parliament given legislative expression.

I refer, of course, to this House passing Bill C-93 and sending it to the other place. In doing so we declared that multiculturalism is a view of the country and describes a policy of the Government of Canada which is to characterize every federal institution. That Bill was available to us when the Broadcasting Act was reaching its final stages, and I think it is eminently fair to ask ourselves to what extent Bill C-136 has been developed and put before us in the context of Bill C-93.

I do not think it is going to be difficult to say that this Bill falls far short of what we would expect in the context of multiculturalism. It only underscores the extent to which our supposed commitment to multiculturalism is a matter of slogans, specific events and days, but is not acceptance of a reality that should be reflected in all the institutions the federal Government directs and controls. It is certainly not going to be adequately expressed in Canadian broadcasting if this Bill passes the House unchanged.

In order to justify those comments I want to take a look at Clause 3 of the Bill in particular. That clause sets forth at some length a broadcasting policy for Canada. To do so I shall have to cite a number of paragraphs indicating how much the

Bill reflects the context of the 1960s, lives within the world of official bilingualism, and only in occasional references suggests that larger view that should have been basic in elaborating a broadcasting policy.

We are told, first, that the Canadian broadcasting system will operate primarily in the English and French languages. Then, of course, there are other references. We are told further on that it is designed "through its operations and programming to reflect the circumstances and aspirations of Canadian men and women, including the linguistic duality and multicultural nature of Canadian society, and the special place of aboriginal peoples within that society." That describes an aspect of the entire broadcasting system.

When we turn to those sections that describe the programming provided by the CBC, we find no such broad vision at all. The programming provided by the CBC should, it says, "be in English and French, reflecting the different needs and circumstances of each official language community, including the particular needs and circumstances of English and French linguistic minorities." Nothing better spells out our view, based on the experience of the 1960s, inadequately developed beyond our view of the country as officially bilingual, of the constraints within which the CBC and Radio Canada have carried on their functions.

Certainly the Bill continues to provide a requirement for enlightenment, the point the Minister was debating earlier. However, the very point that she and I were briefly discussing earlier this morning, the widespread ignorance about our citizens of various cultures, seems to me here, in the most important area where the CBC carries out the federal Government's mandate for informing and enlightening Canadians about other citizens, to lack any explicit declaration that the CBC is to ensure that the multicultural nature of the country is recognized.

Certainly it is part of the general broadcasting policy, yet we know how far short our broadcasters have fallen in achieving that. To leave the CBC without an obligation to do that is just an indication of how limited the vision of the Government is, and to how limited an extent the multicultural policy of 1971, legislated now in Bill C-93, has been put before the directors of the CBC and Radio Canada in ensuring that they will respect the reality of the country.

• (1230)

There is in this area a fundamental point to be made. The federal Government will operate in English and French. The federal Government will speak to all Canadians in those two languages with some very limited recognition that there are Canadians who need to be addressed, presumably through the ethnic press or multilingual broadcasting, in other languages as well. Immigrants come to this country, persons of diverse cultures from all the continents of the earth and live in this country and work in public life in those two languages. To assume that the cultures that they reflect, which continue to