

*Government Orders*

I take some pride—and I am sure members opposite can share in that—in the realization that tonight we have before us the final stages of debate in third reading of a broadcasting bill. The previous administration sought perhaps to bite off more than could realistically be chewed at the time when it had an omnibus communications bill which did not pass when the Thirty-Second Parliament was dissolved.

Then, of course, in the Thirty-Third Parliament there was Bill C-136. Bill C-136 was the fruit of the labours of the Caplan-Sauvageau Task Force and the Standing Committee on Communications and Culture in which the hon. member from Mount Royal laboured so diligently and made such a signal contribution, as did Lynn McDonald, the former New Democratic Party critic.

I appreciate the graciousness which members have extended to me in their comments about my involvement in this work. If anyone is going to “vix merbs” tonight I think it may be me because I left Sydney, Australia at ten o’clock this morning, Australia time, when I learned that there was a possibility of participating in this debate.

There have been reports in the press that the government had sought to delay this bill and I just wanted to allay those beliefs. That is speculation and I am happy to say that the speculation is totally unfounded. It is true that the bill was reported back to this House in March of this year. You yourself, Mr. Speaker, participated well in the legislative committee that dealt with the bill. We had a very distinguished chairman of the committee.

Then, of course, we entered into a phase of national debate, having to do with the very future of our country, focused on the Meech Lake Accord. I respect that the hon. member for Mount Royal and I hold totally different views on many aspects of that now defunct accord. It was not my decision, but in my judgement it would have been wholly inappropriate to have subjected the country to the kind of filibuster that was suggested would be upon us if that bill were put through the House in the months of May and June of this year, having to do with aspects of the bill which the hon. member for Mount Royal and others disagreed with profoundly.

So, we have the bill back before us now. We had two half days in late October in which we managed to get 12 per cent of the amendments dealt with at report stage and I must confess that before I departed on my family errand to Australia, I despaired of getting the bill through during the life of this Parliament, because of the sincere expression by members opposite that they wanted to “destroy a bad bill”, to quote directly from one of them. I am grateful to the minister who was here last week and yesterday to shepherd this bill through report stage. I am sorry that I was not here to assist him in that regard, but he managed rather well I am given to understand.

When we were beginning report stage in late October, there was a rather strong barrage of support for the bill and I want to refer to one distinguished Canadian who said that there are both symbolic and practical reasons for passing C-40 now. Symbolically, it will send a much needed signal of hope to Canadians that parliament believes in some civilized future for the Canadian family and in a rich more realistic dialogue among Canadians who, at this time in our history, want to find again a sense of reconnection and mutual self-respect.

He went on to say: “In practical terms, C-40 will give the CRTC much stronger and more credible enforcement powers such as court orders and fines. Even though we maintain our position as to the tandem powers of direction and review, on balance I think the result is very positive. The regulatory watch-dog may have a slightly shorter leash in theory, but it will have much longer teeth.” That is a quotation from Keith Spicer who, at that time, was serving as chairman of the CRTC. He made the remarks in Vancouver on October 26 of this year.

• (1910)

There was a good deal said by the hon. member for Mount Royal, in her very thorough contribution to today’s debate, about a number of aspects of the bill. In particular, one aspect that piqued my interest was her despairing of what she saw as a lack of commitment to Canada in the bill.

I recall the labours of the standing committee where I think all of us were unanimously committed to seeing broadcasting policy and broadcasting legislation that would truly enhance the Canadianness of all of the components of the Canadian broadcasting system, public and private.