

Canadian Policy on Broadcasting

Useless to say that this decision of the B.B.C. was not warmly received by the people of the Saguenay-Lake St. John area because all the towns in the area had fully supported this project conceived by a team of progressive and dynamic young people.

I conclude my remarks here, Mr. Speaker, but I wish to assure the house that we will follow carefully the consideration of this bill, with the intention of suggesting amendments, if necessary.

• (12:30 p.m.)

[*English*]

Mr. John R. Matheson (Parliamentary Secretary to Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, there are stark and convincing reasons why this bill on Canadian broadcasting, and the C.B.C. in particular, should be both clear and unequivocal, and why the new heads of the C.B.C. must understand fully the intent of parliament in passing the bill.

Sir, on invitation and speaking entirely on my own behalf, I addressed the Canadian Club in Winnipeg on December 8, 1966. I said at that time:

The problem which I wish to place before you today, after a long period of developing concern and heart searching, I believe to be of the greatest possible importance to Canada.

I expressed the conviction that the communications media is the nervous system of nationhood, that any defect or illness in this nervous system can be just as crippling to a country as to a human body.

I tried to develop in my thoughts at that time the importance of the Greek idea of balance to liberty and to the democratic idea. The Greeks were not content to leave things as they found them, but they employed restraint in the process of improvement and the result has been distinguished by the quality of balance and completeness. Then I made this point:

By way of direct contrast to this Greek view of balance a "new" philosophy is now being expounded by a determined group in the communications media.

That was the one point that I developed, that Canadians were now being subjected to propaganda and, even more serious, to censorship by exclusion.

My address was made to a large room full of people but later there were thousands of requests for the address and I became quickly seized of the fact that this was one of the primary concerns to Canadians at large.

[Mr. Simard.]

I had been told that this is a subject a politician does not discuss, that a man may pull down Canada, the church, the family, anything, but the one thing he cannot put his finger on and hope to survive is the real establishment in Canada, the opinion-makers who direct broadcasting output. I was told that if he does he is finished. I do not believe this at all.

The most important thing as we look at this bill is not to consider only the organization of this most important industry—this has been done thoroughly and very well—but to deal with the basics, the final product, the question of output. I am extremely proud of the government that I have the honour to support, of the Prime Minister (Mr. Pearson) and the Secretary of State (Miss LaMarsh), for what I think is courageous leadership at this time in this direction. I believe that this great Canadian creation, the C.B.C., is in very truth the nervous system of nationhood. It has stirred us with tremendous contributions during the last three decades. I can think of the compelling reporting of the war years, our recent centennial triumphs, the poignancy of the Vanier funeral, the excellence of its sports coverage, its over-all technical brilliance—these have all contributed to our becoming a nation. In many respects our C.B.C. is the finest national system in the world, and I have visited a number of national systems in Europe and Asia.

This past year has proved on many occasions just how good Canadian broadcasting can be at its best. But at the same time within the C.B.C. we have become aware of pockets of positive danger in important sectors of programming. Sir, I feel we dare not return now to the cynical defeatist, nation-dividing atmosphere of the immediate pre-centennial, pre-Expo era. Journalists tell us Expo has spelled the end of cynicism. I think Canadians are determined to move forward together from the celebrations of 1967 to new triumphs in a great new century.

Turning to the bill I particularly want to address myself to those clauses under Part I. I am delighted with the structure of the bill. It speaks of preserving and strengthening "the cultural, political, social and economic fabric of Canada." I think Mr. Lubor Zink suggested that the operative words might be "to safeguard, enrich and strengthen." Then, in clause 2(d) the bill goes on to speak of varied and comprehensive programming, providing "reasonable opportunity for the expression of conflicting views on matters of