

Government Orders

Mr. Bob Wood (Nipissing): It gives me great pleasure to stand in the House tonight and give my views on Bill C-40, the Broadcasting Act. There is absolutely no doubt that we need to introduce new legislation to modernize regulations that affect that particular industry. The technology in this industry has advanced at an incredible pace in the last 20 years without any major reforms to the laws that regulate it.

I have to be honest and say that Bill C-40 will bring some good changes. However, it fails in many other aspects. I am specifically making reference to the elimination of the national unity clause for CBC, the creation of two programming committees for French and English within CBC's board and the duality of powers by the Governor in Council over the CRTC. These are three major concerns that I want to bring forward to the House regarding this bill.

The 1969 Broadcasting Act required that the CBC contribute to the development of national unity. This reference has been dropped in Bill C-40. I believe that developing its national personality and building its sense of national identity and consciousness are factors needed to build Canadian national unity. We need a strong national institution like the CBC to weave all regions and the diverse participants in Canadian society into one unified force.

Arguments have been made that the national unity laws will cause what the Minister of Communications called intolerable interference and a constrain on freedom of expression.

We have seen in the last year extensive coverage by the CBC on issues which have severely divided our country. Examples are the Meech Lake Accord, the Brockville incident and, obviously, the clause on national unity did not interfere in any way with the coverage CBC gave to these events.

Pierre Juneau, the former President of the CBC, said he had no trouble with the national unity mandate during the time that he held his post. I fail to see any credible reason for eliminating the present national mandate of the CBC.

The Chairman of the Communications and Culture Committee has said: "Removing the pursuit of national unity as an objective of the Crown owned radio and television network has a negative connotation about unity. Dropping such a phrase now would indicate we are

going in two separate ways. It would be most unfortunate." He said that on May 9, 1990.

Now, if the government will not listen to the opposition or industry experts perhaps it should listen to the member of its own caucus and also the Chairman of the Communications and Culture Committee.

To remove the national unity clause is to say that there is no Canadian unity and, therefore, no common values that Canadians share from coast to coast to coast. I do not believe that that is the case. We certainly have our differences and that is healthy. However, the share of values that we hold as a nation have to be well represented through our national institutions and that is what CBC is, a national institution. Let us keep the national unity clause where it is.

I also want to state that I disagree with the creation of two separate standing committees on English and French language programming at the CBC. CBC executives have also expressed their disagreement with this form of management. Why create two committees to administer the CBC? While the CBC is trying to cut operation costs because of this government's budget slashing, I fail to see how this committee system will aid CBC management in its own objective of cutting costs. In fact, I think that it will probably cause an overlapping of work and increased administrative costs. I do not see any particular purpose to this two-committee system, other than it seems to continue promoting division within the country.

Patrick Watson, the Chairman of CBC, had this to say about the two-committee system: "This is perhaps the most outstanding and strongly felt concern of our board on the proposal that there be created a French and English programing standing committee within the board of CBC."

Gerard Veilleux stated the following regarding the same issue: "I do not know how to tell you that I do not look forward with a great deal of enthusiasm to having to split my staff, the staff of the CBC and Radio-Canada, and I say to you that this is very, very dangerous."

Finally, Keith Spicer, who said: "Personally, I would not be in favour of creating two separate committees." Therefore, I think at some point, in addition to a very strong, secure representative and representation of the English and French sides of things, we must have a national view as well.