

Non-Canadian Publications

require foreign publications in Canada to be at least a majority, or 75 per cent owned by Canadians, where we obviously get into difficulty is when the government states that for any advantage to accrue to the periodical being owned by Canadians it should have a content that in some arbitrary way meets the requirements of, say, the Department of National Revenue.

When comments along this line were being made earlier by the hon. member for Hillsborough who was challenging the concept of an 80 per cent content rule, the Minister of National Revenue (Mr. Basford) shouted, "Would you sooner have 70 per cent or 60 per cent?" I would suggest that indicates that the minister is insensitive to what we are speaking about today. We are speaking about the possibility that so-called content rules could be used by the government in power to influence their decision as to who shall be treated as a Canadian magazine and who shall be treated as a non-Canadian magazine. To the extent that any government in future could use that power to thwart freedom of the press, I believe the rule must be resisted.

I have been alarmed over the past few months by the growing indifference of this government to freedom of the press. Let me refer to the response made by the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs (Mr. Ouellet) when he appeared before the Standing Committee on Finance, Trade and Economic Affairs in April. On that occasion he gave newsmen further cause for concern when questioned on certain measures in the proposed competition bill which is now before the committee.

• (1640)

The Canadian Newspaper Publishers' Association had asked for changes in the bill to ensure freedom of the press. They pointed out in their brief that unless the act is modified, purchasers of advertising may agree together to prevent or lessen competition in the purchase of their advertising generally, or in relation to a particular medium of communication or in relation to a particular newspaper or radio or television station. They asked the government to put advertisers in the same position as others who would conspire in such a way; that is, they asked the government to make it illegal. Mr. Ouellet, who appeared before the committee, was entirely unsympathetic to the proposal of the newspaper publishers.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Morin): Order, please. I remind the hon. member that when referring to the minister he should refer to his portfolio.

Mr. Stevens: Yes, Madam Speaker. I said in committee that, given the *Le Jour* incident and the government's apparently firm position not to protect the news media from advertising conspiracies, we have an indication of how fragile freedom of the press may be in this country. This view was heightened by the remarks of the minister's parliamentary secretary, the hon. member for Ontario (Mr. Cafik) who chose that occasion in committee to register his hostility to the press in his area, a hostility arising from treatment afforded him during political campaigns. He is reported to have said:

As soon as an election writ is issued you get a visit from all the advertising people from each of the newspapers, and some of them
[Mr. Stevens.]

make it very clear—and some of them do it less overtly—that they would like to know what advertising you are going to give them, and the message is certainly fairly self-evident before the conversation is over that if you do not advertise with them, you will not get any coverage. I have found that the impression that that is true is usually substantiated in fact. I have found that from those with whom we do not advertise, we certainly do not get any coverage.

The hon. member, whose absence I am sorry to note, then was more specific. Referring to the Inland Publishing Group, which apparently has newspapers in his riding, he is reported to have asked witnesses appearing on behalf of the Daily Newspaper Association the following question:

What is your view about publishers who own a number of small newspapers who in fact would have exactly the same editorial go out from all of them in respect of a very sensitive subject, when in fact those local newspapers carry the banner, and create the appearance of being locally oriented newspapers, but they are really centrally controlled... does this strike you as being responsible policy?

The witness stated that they did not agree with such policy. Then the hon. member for Ontario shouted, "What would you do about it?" and Mr. St. Clair Balfour, president of Southam Press, replied, "It would never happen in my company." Mr. John J. Robinette, Q.C., counsel for the Daily Newspaper Association, added in jest that we are "the good guys." The hon. member for Ontario concluded by saying, "We make a distinction between the good guys and the bad guys, I guess." That exchange should give cause for alarm as it indicates the attitude of the minister, the government, and of the parliamentary secretary on the question of freedom of the press. Apparently the minister and the parliamentary secretary think that if a newspaper publishes something they do not find attractive, certain repercussions should follow.

Given the present political atmosphere, the language of Bill C-58 leaves much to be desired. To the extent that we impose arbitrary rules for content and decide who is a bad guy and who is a good guy, the freedom of the press is lessened. Consider, for example, the action which the Quebec government might take to restrict the activity of the press in that province. The premier of the province has indicated that he plans to introduce a bill in the provincial legislature which will affect the concentration of press power in that province.

I think we should put on record what has been said by at least one minister of the Bourassa government about the provisions of the proposed press legislation in Quebec. Fernand Lalonde, minister without portfolio, indicated in Toronto not long ago that the Quebec government is thinking of imposing a code of ethics on the Quebec press; in other words, there are to be guidelines on what may or not be published in the newspapers. That is an alarming suggestion. That government, which has been stung by certain press comments and does not like being criticized about current scandals in the province, has suggested, through the mouth of one of its cabinet ministers, that it will introduce a code of ethics to govern newsmen and newspapers.

In light of current events, we in this House must make doubly sure that Bill C-58 does not in any way give this or any future government a weapon to use against publications in this country, a weapon which can be used in accordance with the political feelings of the government or the minister of the day. Let me make another point about the situation in Quebec. In the *Montreal Star* of