

CRTC Act

One of the areas in the Bill that is extremely important and that we in this Party are pleased to see is Clause 3 which adds the following paragraph to the Broadcasting Act. It reads:

the programming provided by the Canadian Broadcasting system should respect and promote the equality and dignity of all individuals, groups or classes of individuals regardless of race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age or mental or physical disability;

We are glad to see that clause in the Bill because we know it is directly the result of the very strenuous work of the Hon. Member for Broadview-Greenwood (Ms. McDonald) who in the last Parliament was very active in bringing the whole question of broadcasting that was abusive to women and pornographic to the attention of Members of Parliament and the Canadian public in general. She was very active in pushing this issue and I am glad to see the Government is taking action, although, as the Member herself has said in commenting, it would be better if the wording read that the Canadian broadcasting system "must" respect and promote equality rather than "should".

In addition to these specific comments about the Bill, I have some broad concern about broadcasting in Canada, in particular the \$85 million worth of cuts announced in the budget of the CBC, being a 9.5 per cent portion of its proposed budget. I hope all Members in the House would agree that the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation is very important to Canadian unity and to our sense of a Canadian identity. I am pleased to see that the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Communications (Mr. Scott) agrees, and I hope he can bring other members of his Party on side because we face very strong cultural pressures from the United States. Some of these pressures are positive and some are negative. Regardless of whether they are positive or negative, it makes it very difficult for us to resist those pressures if we are dealing on a straight commercial basis. Profit motive has its place no doubt in such things as broadcasting and in the cultural area as in other areas of our society, but the profit motive is not in itself sufficient to protect Canadian unity and Canadian identity from the kinds of pressures we receive from our powerful neighbour to the south. It is important that we have a strong CBC.

● (1650)

It is interesting that while there have been some criticisms of the CBC for being inefficient, the last study that was conducted some seven years ago by McKinsey and Company came to the following principal conclusions:

1. Judging by hours produced in relation to expenditures and numbers of employees, the CBC is an efficient and productive organization compared to other public broadcasters.

It compares the CBC with public broadcasters in other parts of the world.

2. The corporation carries out its mandate with fewer resources than could the aggregate Canadian private sector as it is now constituted. Where the CBC incurs higher costs in individual program areas, it is generally due to the corporation's interpretations of its mandate responsibilities, rather than to inefficiency.

Quite apart from the question of economic efficiency, we need to recognize that the CBC cannot be judged entirely on the basis of the ratio between its costs and the size of the listening or viewing audience. It serves a wider and more important function in terms of Canadian society. My Party believes that the CBC serves a function that cannot be met by private outlet. For example, we can consider the question of what is news and how we determine what gets reported.

I heard a very interesting commentary over the CBC this morning by Barry Zwicker. He was talking about the Eaton strike and said that apart from *The Toronto Star*, *The Globe and Mail* and the CBC, there is a virtual blackout in the news media with respect to that strike against seven Eatons stores in Ontario. The facts of that strike are not getting out to the Canadian public.

While a lot of private publishing and broadcast corporations talk a great deal about freedom of expression, Mr. Zwicker pointed out that the Standard Broadcasting Company refused to carry Ontario Federation of Labour advertisements regarding the Eaton strike. This raises some serious questions about what freedom of the press really means when you have large corporations with interlocking directorates having power over broadcasting corporations. When we look at issues like that, it is important that we have a public broadcasting system such as the CBC.

If freedom of the press is going to mean anything, we need to have a strong and independent CBC. That does not mean that the CBC will be immune from criticism. I am very unhappy about some of the cuts it is making in programming, for example cutting the program *Our Native Land*. That is the one program that gives information about Indians, Metis and Inuit people on a regular basis to communities across Canada. Canadians should express their views about that very strongly. I hope the CBC administration will be responsive to that kind of representation. I believe at the same time that the CBC has to be independent.

With those comments, I will close by saying that we regard this Bill largely in a favourable light. There are some amendments that I am sure my colleagues will be moving in committee, but I thank you for this opportunity to speak.

Mr. Marchi: Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to the Member before me speak on government action or government directives to bodies like the CRTC, stating that his Party was in favour of that sort of contact between the Government and the broadcasting bodies of this country. At the same time, he outlined with some degree of passion and sincerity the problems that we have witnessed in recent CBC cuts to the tune of \$85 million. I am curious to know how the Member can speak to both those items. From where I sit, they seem to be in direct opposition. If we are to give this Government the direct mandate to dictate to a far greater degree than in the past, what assurances does the Member have that we will not see the same devastating cuts that we have been experiencing of late? What assurance does he have that this Government will protect the broadcasting and cultural agencies across this country?