

*Government Orders*

the bill going to do? It was going to guarantee a bit of the slice of the pie for Canadian film distributors. Americans only have 97 per cent, they did not want to make any changes there. So this government, ready-aye-ready, withdrew the bill.

• (1420)

I got hold of its bill and I put it in as one of my private members' bills so that the whole country can see what the original bill was going to do and can see a perfect textbook example of how the Americans influenced our cultural policy and got the Mulroney government to withdraw a bill. That is the kind of thing we are faced with when we are dealing with this government.

Let me return to this particular bill and give some general criticisms of it. I believe, first, that the bill will lead to the increased North Americanization of Canadian broadcasting. We are in a fight to keep this country. It is not just Meech Lake that is the problem in this country, it is the rapidly growing loss of independence in this country through the free trade deal and through the way we are dealing with our own institutions in Canada, including Meech Lake.

The government rejected key standing committee recommendations to ensure a distinctive Canadian market. We believe that this rejection is linked to the trade deal. That is my first criticism of the bill and I will come back to that in more detail.

The second one is that the bill is a gift to the cable industry. Cable gets the right to originate programming far beyond its current community obligations. This mixing of content and carriage creates the potential for a clear conflict of interest. In addition, the government has done nothing to regulate outrageous cable industry profits. Cable is the only territorial monopoly in Canada whose profits are unregulated. The phone companies are regulated.

Finally, cable's right to import foreign programming as it sees fit is in no way limited. MPs in this House will tell you that people are phoning them and complaining about cable fees going up and about what is happening in terms of their dial. The cable industry is making a bundle off of them. They have a 30 per cent rate of return on

their profit. Canadians are starting to notice that because they are calling our offices.

Third, while the government has given a broad mandate to the CBC, the corporation has taken such a financial beating over the last five years that, in my view, it cannot realistically meet its legislative obligations in spite of what some of the witnesses said last night.

In the first four years of this government the CBC went from \$905 million to \$775 million in real terms. Now, with the budget last spring, there is a further \$140 million cut-back over the next five years. We may have good people who are going to be in charge of the CBC, but they are going to have to produce loaves and fishes for the CBC, they are going to have to produce miracles. I just do not see how they can do it. The CBC needs money to operate.

The other day the minister announced that he would give some additional funds to the CBC, just like that, to help it over a little period. While we appreciate the CBC getting a little bit of extra money, this is a bad pattern. Last night, Mr. Veilleux, the new Chief Executive Officer, said: "We will try and cut back and if we need a bit more we will go back to the minister".

The problem here is that you open up the danger of political control of the CBC, in even subtle ways, when you have to keep going back for bits and bits of money. You need a five-year plan. That is what the House of Commons committee recommended, a five-year plan properly funded.

The fourth objection in principle is that every report on broadcasting in the last decade has decided that the private sector in Canada is not doing its job in providing a distinctively Canadian service and producing quality programming in Canada. That is the private sector now. This bill does little to change this except to provide the possibility of a performance incentive programming that practically everybody in our committee agrees will not work. The private sector keeps promising the CRTC, it keeps coming back to the CRTC and the CRTC lets it off the hook. If the private sector does not produce this Canadian programming, the CRTC should just take away its licence. Forget the performance incentive programs, they will not work. You must have a strict term. If you do not produce, we will take away your licence. In that way