

*CRTC Act*

disagrees with what the Government has put forward as a directive, he or she can of course decide to resign and use his or her talents elsewhere.

I am suggesting that the mechanisms here may well be worth copying and emulating in the case of other Crown agencies and Crown corporations. I look forward to seeing that as perhaps a more desirable alternative to some of the ideologically inspired efforts of certain members of the government Party who seem to want simply to abolish Crown corporations holus-bolus on the grounds that they interfere with the free enterprise system, that it is wrong for them to exist, or for whatever other reasons they may be able to put forward.

This country has a public-enterprise history and a very proud one. We have a history of public involvement in the development of our country, which goes back prior to the creation of Crown corporations, with the public investment in the building of the Canadian Pacific Railway. The Fathers of Confederation were quite ready to have public enterprise then and they began a very large private enterprise with government grants. Nonetheless, there has been a great deal of public involvement and we in this country are very different in our political culture from the United States where there are no public enterprises such as the ones we have here.

If we want our country to stay together, I do not think that we can do without public enterprise. However, I believe it is necessary to talk about an evolution in the way Crown agencies and Crown corporations work. What is before us within Bill C-20 may in fact represent that kind of evolution.

May I suggest, however, that there are some areas in which directives may be very desirable. I for one would like to see a greater sense of public responsibility on the part of the CTV network, the largest independent or private-sector network, to carry out its responsibilities as a Canadian broadcasting entity. I have no criticism about the way the CTV covers sports. I think it does a reasonably fine job when it comes to news coverage at 11 p.m. I have no problems with those things. My problem lies with the fact that that is just about where the CTV's initiative ends. Its efforts to foster Canadian culture and a greater understanding between different parts of the country, apart from the news and a small public affairs segment, are virtually negligible. If the Government were thinking of giving directives, and if it did not feel that it was biting the hand that fed it, it might think of giving some directives to the CRTC with respect to cracking down on the CTV to ensure that it does a better job as a national broadcasting entity than it is doing now.

I am told by friends within the CRTC that the Global Television Network is in fact doing more of that kind of Canadian broadcasting than it was doing before. It is claimed by people I know within the CRTC that that is partly because of pressures put by the CRTC. If the Global network is doing so much better than the CTV when it is a much younger network and has had far more commercial difficulties than the CTV, then why the devil can the same thing not be done with respect to the CTV?

I would like to suggest—dare I say it—that there is still a thought in my mind that broadcasting is a privilege and not a right, that a broadcasting licence should be treated as a privilege and not as a right, and that if a broadcaster fails to live up to the company's undertakings to the CRTC with respect to Canadian content and service, we should have no hesitation in withdrawing that privilege and putting it in the hands of some other group and perhaps even a co-operative or a consumer-owned radio or television station undertaking which will do the job in a way that the private enterprise did not.

Regrettably, in the past the CRTC has been prepared to allow owners of broadcasting undertakings to deal with those undertakings as if they were composed of shares in any other private enterprise without regard to the public responsibilities of broadcasting. The CRTC has ratified changes in ownership of broadcasting undertakings but rarely has it bothered to look to see whether or not those changes of ownership were in the public interest. The CRTC has bought the private-sector ethic and believes that if one owner wants to sell a broadcasting station to another owner, that is okay and they should effectively have the right to do so regardless of the principle on which the CRTC is founded, which is that the air waves are public property and not private property. I am speaking as a New Democrat and as a democratic socialist. I like to think that the air waves are one of the things which are still public property and for which there should be public responsibilities if people are given the right to use them.

Perhaps I can say one other thing to the CRTC and to the Government as well. I get concerned when friends of mine give me information about the services offered by Canadian cable companies in their efforts to gain cable franchises in the United States. You would be amazed, Mr. Speaker, by the depth and the variety of the community-sponsored television and public service channels which have been offered by these Canadian companies in attempting to get franchises in the United States. What is particularly interesting about that is that this country is cabled to the extent of 60 per cent to 65 per cent of television subscribers, but these same cable companies have been quite content with not offering those services here. They have their privileges. They are able to distribute their programs. They perform some public service broadcasting, but not nearly the amount they are offering to new franchises in the United States. If they can offer these services in the United States, why is the CRTC not insisting that those cable companies keep pace with technology in terms of the services which are offered here, in order to allow subscribers in Canada to have a much greater range of services which should and could become available?

● (1550)

I would like to say a bit about the CRTC's jurisdiction over telephones. It is an area in which I feel an important directive from Cabinet will be required very soon. I watched with great misgiving, when I was a member of the provincial Government, the manoeuvring, the finagling, the planning and the strategizing by Bell Canada and other telephone companies