

*Canadian Policy on Broadcasting*

amendments in the interest of clarification or simplification. The reason for this is that there is not very much wrong with the provisions of the present act with regard to the powers of the C.B.C. The principal weakness of the 1958 act is its failure to establish a proper relationship between the corporation, the regulatory authority, and parliament. Thus the changes that will have the largest effect on the operations of the C.B.C. are those relating to the authority of parliament, the government, and the commission, which are set out in part II of the bill and with which I have already dealt.

The most important of these is, without doubt, the establishment of a statutory mandate for the national broadcasting service, a matter which was previously left to the discretion of the corporation itself to the exclusion of the B.B.G. Under the new legislation the commission's authority over the C.B.C. will be clearly defined and will be exercisable only by regulation or conditions of licence, all of which must conform to the broad policy enacted by parliament. The standing committee agreed that the C.B.C. should be subject to such regulation and control on the understanding that this does not imply any power to give directions in respect of specific programming except by general regulation or conditions of licences. The only exception to this is the reserve power to direct the pre-emption of broadcasting time in an emergency or for special purposes, to which I have already referred.

The standing committee also stipulated that the responsibility for programming must rest with the C.B.C. board and management but also recommended that a reconstituted B.B.G. should provide an assessment of our broadcasting system. All these requirements are met precisely in the bill. If the commission is of the opinion that the C.B.C. has not complied with the conditions of its licences—and it is to be remembered that these must conform to the policy enacted by parliament—a report must be made to parliament so that the alleged failure of the C.B.C. in its responsibility to parliament may be openly discussed and adjudicated.

Let us see how this system might work if hon. members were dissatisfied with some particular or general aspect of C.B.C. programming. All that would be necessary would be to call upon the commission, through the minister, to report whether the corporation had in fact failed to comply with regulations or the conditions of its licences. If

it has so failed the C.B.C. board and management should be called to account and, if necessary, dismissed. Should the commissioner's report show that the C.B.C. had not committed any breach of the regulations or conditions of licence, then it is clear that the blame, if any, would be attributable to the commission, for the only possible conclusion would be that the commission had failed to interpret the intentions of parliament correctly in framing the regulations or conditions of licence. There is reason to believe that this procedure would eliminate a good deal of parliamentary discussion on programming matters, while still affording more practical means for parliament to assert its ultimate authority over programming, to be fully informed on matters which appear to be contrary to statutory policy, and to pass judgment on whoever may be shown to have been responsible. This is a very complex matter and members of parliament have been concerned about how parliament in that sense can control this important corporation.

What we are faced with here, Mr. Speaker, is a paradoxical conflict between two perfectly legitimate lines of thought. On the one hand, ever since the inception of the public broadcasting system in Canada almost everybody has agreed that the responsibility for programming must be left to the C.B.C., which must be totally protected from outside influences and pressures. On the other hand, almost everybody at one time or another, including many hon. members, has been shocked or infuriated by some aspect of C.B.C. programming, and the natural reaction is to demand that something should be done about it. The plain fact is that in broadcasting, more than in almost any other field of activity, absolute delegation of authority and responsibility is inevitable. In news and public affairs broadcasts, where urgency and topicality are often paramount reliance must be placed on the judgment of the individual producer or announcer, and his judgment must often be exercised instantaneously. On the entertainment side the choice of programs is very often a matter of personal taste, which can never be absolute or tied to precise standards. What is acceptable to you may not be acceptable to me.

For these reasons, for its performance and reputation the C.B.C. as a whole necessarily depends on the judgment and taste of a host of individuals who must be given the maximum practical freedom of expression if the corporation is to fulfil its duty to provide a

[Miss LaMarsh.]