

Canadian Policy on Broadcasting

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Hon. gentlemen opposite are saying that the minister should not have made the remarks she did, but they do not explain in what other manner she might have criticized the C.B.C., for cause. In other words, hon. gentlemen opposite seem to be saying that she must at all times accept without question the direction, the programming and the administration of the C.B.C. If she did that, they would be the first to criticize her again. The minister answers to the house for the C.B.C., but she cannot interfere.

An hon. Member: Can she not make a decision?

Mr. Otto: The hon. gentleman has asked why she does not make a decision. What decision is there to be taken which you would accept, and not immediately say is interference? As I say, although the minister might have made her criticism in a way which is objectionable to some hon. members opposite, the substance of the criticism is warranted. In fact, of all the departments, the C.B.C. is probably the only quasi governmental or quasi administrative department. This is the only department which is responsible to no one. I wonder whether this fact is known to a great number of members: The C.B.C. is responsible to absolutely no one.

The C.B.C. does not need to worry about money, because the estimates come down every year and no one dare question those estimates. The minister tables the estimates and sometimes, but very rarely, there is a vote. There is no restriction in respect of the financial requirements. I am still waiting to hear someone explain how we could introduce some measure of responsibility to the C.B.C. without being accused of political interference. I do not know whether this bill provides the answer to the question. However I will endeavour to review it later.

The C.B.C. of course has been worthy of praise in respect of the quality of the programming. On the other hand, however, because of this lack of responsibility the Canadian citizens who are the shareholders of the C.B.C. and also the viewers, do not have any communication whatsoever with the directors of the corporation. No one can dictate or even make a suggestion to the C.B.C. What can anyone do? One could write to the C.B.C. and say that he does not like the programming policy or the administration, but that is as far as it would go.

[Mr. Otto.]

We do not dare criticize the C.B.C. Members opposite have just proven that the minister dare not criticize or in any way suggest the C.B.C. might be improperly carrying out its administrative function. I am not sure whether or not this bill covers the point. I believe we will still be left with the important question of how we can introduce responsibility. In the field of private broadcasting the problem is not serious. To every action there is a reaction, because private broadcasters must obtain their financial support from industry and commerce. At all times any irresponsibility certainly would be questioned and might affect their ability to carry on. The C.B.C., however, is not worried about this.

Perhaps I might give an example. At the moment the C.B.C. has gone off on a great tangent in respect of pollution. Some programming people and writers are greatly concerned about water and air pollution. We all know there is a problem in this regard. First they show all these pictures of little children's lungs exploding because of the filthy air, and so on. They cover every conceivable angle. I suppose if we went back far enough we could even get the same type of pictures in the Garden of Eden.

I am not suggesting that it is not time some action should be taken in the problem of pollution, but I do suggest that I have not yet seen a C.B.C. program which shows the other side of the coin; in other words, what we should do about it. Finally they suggest that the viewers should write to their member asking that the pollution be cleaned up. However, we do have a border, and industry can move across the border and thereby save a great deal of money if the cost of pollution control should prove to be prohibitive. Then who will answer for the unemployment situation which will arise? Not the C.B.C. It is all very well for someone to bring up a great challenge and a great ideal, but there must be some responsibility behind it.

The C.B.C. does not have any responsibility behind its thinking, whether it is the Truscott case, the Viet Nam situation or pollution which is involved. All these are tangents which possibly have a worth-while basis, but in respect of which we never hear the other side of the problem. I hope this bill will help bring about a new sense of responsibility to the C.B.C. and a regard for the views of its shareholders.