

Adjournment Debate

MULTICULTURALISM—REQUEST FOR PROGRAM TO ASSIST ETHNIC PRESS IN LIGHT OF POSTAGE RATE INCREASES

Mr. Joe Clark (Rocky Mountain): Mr. Speaker, I want to turn to a matter which was first raised in the House on June 18. That, you will recall, was when the country discovered the Minister of State who is a little bit responsible for multiculturalism. You will recall that the minister spent about one-tenth of his total budget on an advertisement which featured a campaign picture of the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) and purported to advertise a program of grants which was already oversubscribed. To add to the excitement, the minister had been chastised by the assistant undersecretary of another department who, it turned out, had more authority over the minister's program than did the minister.

That storm has blown over. The minister's assistant who authorized the ads has disappeared. The assistant undersecretary has remained firmly in control. The minister has come back to the House, anxious to resume any responsibilities anyone will give him. An agency, controlled at least 50 per cent by prominent Ontario Liberals, is counting its commission on the account, and the most enduring moment of the affair is the response of the Minister of State who, having been asked why no tenders were called on the ads, said that he was "not aware of any tendering procedure for advertising programs of the federal government".

That flurry erased several important issues. One of them was the attitude the government should take toward the ethnic and periodical press of the country because, apart from patronage and politicking, the other reason for the ads was that they provided a means by which the government might provide some tangible support to the Canadian ethnic press. I want to argue their case tonight, not just in relation to the ethnic papers which generally deserve and require support, but also in relation to the community press generally in Canada which serves needs which larger media cannot meet and which has special problems, some of them caused by the government.

Government support to the community press should be open and above board—by the front door, rather than by occasional back door subsidies in the form of the extravagant and pointless advertising program we saw this June. In passing, I should also point out that even the present program of advertising in the ethnic press seems to treat some periodicals, like the Toronto Jewish press, in a less favourable way than other periodicals.

• (2200)

Mr. Haidasz: That isn't true.

Mr. Clark (Rocky Mountain): There are two kinds of newspapers operating in Canada today, the large and the local. They are generally distinguished by their size, their wealth and by the intensity with which they serve their particular readership. The dailies might help us to understand the world; the weeklies help us to understand ourselves. They are called ethnic or community papers and they are particular to a heritage or a place. Both kinds of papers need ads to live.

[Mr. Oberle.]

At one time, governments and other advertisers treated both kinds of papers almost equally. But in the 1950s and 1960s, as our attitudes became more urban and international, the people who place and pay for ads became bemused by mass markets, and the so-called "institutional ads"—the ads an editor could get a loan on—drifted away to mass media. That was done thoughtlessly, without examination either of the relative impact of an ad in a local or a mass medium, or an examination of the effect upon the vitality of the particular communities these local papers serve. The government was as guilty as anyone.

There are signs that times are changing, and I want to take this opportunity to congratulate the government for giving the community press a fair shot at the ads concerning both the new tax form and the LIP program. But those cases are exceptions; they are not a policy. I understand that the President of the Treasury Board (Mr. Drury), that great progressive, has a proposal before him to gather data on the effectiveness of advertising in the community press. Member papers of the CCNA were enthusiastic about the proposed study and were geared up to co-operate, but the President of the Treasury Board is sitting on the initiative and the enthusiasm of editors is beginning to wane.

There are other problems. The Post Office has established a so-called free zone within a 40 miles radius of small communities and within that zone cheap postal rates apply to local papers. But in Ontario and British Columbia, changes in provincial law have created new local government boundaries, incorporating several towns. They change the status of a town but not its nature, and the Post Office Department, legalistic to the last, has denied free zone status to small towns so incorporated.

Again, newspaper plants which do not have a printing press are disqualified from eligibility for IDB loans, yet the offset revolution, leading to a different style of printing, means that most plants ship out their printing to a central press and so cannot go to the Industrial Development Bank. These are accidental prejudices, just as it was accidental that advertising shifted to mass markets and made survival more difficult for local papers.

We need these local papers, just as we need a multitude of strong ethnic groups and places which have a distinctive sense of community. I ask the government to recognize that need directly and to encourage the various local media of Canada at least as much as we encourage book publishing, the arts and other activities which contribute to a sense of Canadian identity.

Hon. Stanley Haidasz (Minister of State): Mr. Speaker, I welcome this opportunity, replying to the hon. member this evening, to speak about certain aspects of advertising, particularly advertising by the various government departments in the ethnic press and especially as this concerns the policy and programs of multiculturalism.

As the hon. member knows, the Prime Minister's statement on October 8, 1971, announcing his government's official policy of multiculturalism revealed that a study would be undertaken to determine what more could be done to assist the ethnic press. This study was included in the survey on language retention and an evaluation of it is being conducted at the present time.