

*Canadian Policy on Broadcasting*

I have watched the C.B.C. with very close interest since it was established, not merely since I entered parliament but throughout all the years of its existence, and indeed before the particular name C.B.C. came into existence, when the Canadian radio commission, a name being revived in this bill, preceded the C.B.C. I do not believe I am using extravagant language when I state my belief, and the belief of many Canadians, that no institution in this country has done more to develop Canadian talent, to give an opportunity for Canadian talent to make a living, to give an opportunity for expression of opinions, for the development of the entertainment industry, for the whole gamut of human interest to be heard and seen by all the people of Canada, than the C.B.C.

Some private stations do a decent job occasionally, but anyone who knows musicians, actors, writers, press gallery members, all the people who have an opportunity to appear on radio and television to express their views, show their talents, or participate in some exciting cultural experience, also knows that without the C.B.C. Canada would be immeasurably poorer than it is now, in the cultural and spiritual sense of that word.

The hon. member for Yukon always reminds me of the kind of person who says: I have an open mind, but don't think you will ever change it. That is the kind of open mind he has, but I would ask even him to be just a little contemporary. I do not expect him to be 100 per cent in the twentieth century; but even 10 per cent in the twentieth century would help. I ask him to note that after years of only private and commercial television and radio in the United States—what do we find in 1967? We find in 1967 that the President of the United States recommended to congress the establishment of a public television corporation. We find in the United States that an act to that effect was enacted a little while ago, after only five or six week's study by a senate committee.

We find President Johnson, when recommending the legislation to congress, saying that what he wanted was a corporation for public television authorized to provide support to non-commercial television and radio. We find that the ex-chairman of the federal communications commission, Mr. Henry, said when that law was passed—and I commend these words to the hon. member for Yukon,

[Mr. Lewis.]

and even to the hon. member for Winnipeg South Centre (Mr. Churchill):

What makes this corporation most exciting is the possibility of a live network unfettered by commercial considerations.

If the great free enterprise country of the United States of America can recognize the value of a public corporation that is not commercially controlled, I should think anyone in this house, who is in 1967 instead of 1767, ought to recognize the value of the C.B.C. What I am worried about, Mr. Speaker, is that recent events have led many of us to believe that there ought to be some tight control over programming in television in general, and in C.B.C. television in particular. I suggest that we ought not permit ourselves to be carried away.

The late Mr. Brockington, who was chairman of the Canadian radio commission, when he appeared before the select committee on radio broadcasting on March 24, 1938, said in his customary fluent and moving English:

We believe that censorship is undesirable and perhaps impossible beyond the limits of decency and the minor and necessary prohibitions which we have fixed in our regulations. We have always, and shall continue always, to take care in the selection of network speakers to see that they are competent to discuss public problems within recognized amenities. We deprecate any tendency on the part of the owners of private stations to allow their own political or social opinions to affect broadcasts from the station which they control.

Censorship itself depends on the opinion of an individual possibly no better qualified to express an opinion than the person he censors.

● (4:50 p.m.)

There is no doubt about the truth of that.

We believe radio speech should be allowed to be forthright, provocative and stimulating. In controversial matters we have tried, and shall try, to allow for the free expression of varied and opposite opinion. Perhaps on occasions, enough varieties of opinions have not been expressed. We believe that national problems and international problems should be discussed by Canadian citizens without restriction or fear. It may be that some opinions largely held, have remained unvoiced. This situation will be remedied.

Then Mr. Brockington went on to say:

We are opposed to, and shall resist, any attempt to regiment opinion and to throttle freedom of utterance. We have not the slightest reason to believe that the government is desirous of such regimentation. Rather we have every reason to believe that the contrary is true. We are prepared, of course, to recognize that in times of war, or perhaps during the imminence of national peril from external sources, some government control might be necessary. Until that occasion arises, the corporation having selected competent commentators and speakers does not propose to interfere with the right of free expression.