

Exerpts of a talk delivered to the Canadian Club in Toronto Monday, April 12, 1976

# CBC and responsibility

The pronouncements by CBC President A.W. Johnson contrast rather strongly with the treatment his corporation has given the Gay Alliance for Equality (GAE) of Halifax. If his statements are to be believed it would seem that he forgot how the CBC head office replied to a letter sent to him by GAE concerning discrimination. While he voices all the high minded platitudes worthy of this office, he in this case at any rate, seems to be taking no initiative in enforcing CRTC regulations and CBC Public Service Announcements policy with his jurisdiction. **Editor's note.**

by A.W. Johnson

I want to say something about this today - something about the purpose of the CBC and its historic position. More specifically, I want to say something about the power and the potential of the broadcasting media, and about the changed and the changing position of the CBC within it. I want to talk about the challenge which today confronts the CBC, and about the goal I believe we in the Corporation should set for ourselves. And I want to say something about how I believe we should set about trying to achieve this goal.

## The CBC'S PURPOSE AND ITS HISTORIC POSITION

To me, the purpose of the CBC is simple and clear, as I have suggested - the preservation and enrichment of Canadianism. Parliament has said this in straight-forward terms, in giving the CBC mandate: **the CBC exists to "Safeguard, enrich and strengthen the cultural, political, social and economic fabric of Canada...and to contribute to the development of national unity and provide for a continuing expression of Canadian identity"**. We are told we are to achieve this goal by providing "a balanced service of information, enlightenment and entertainment...extended

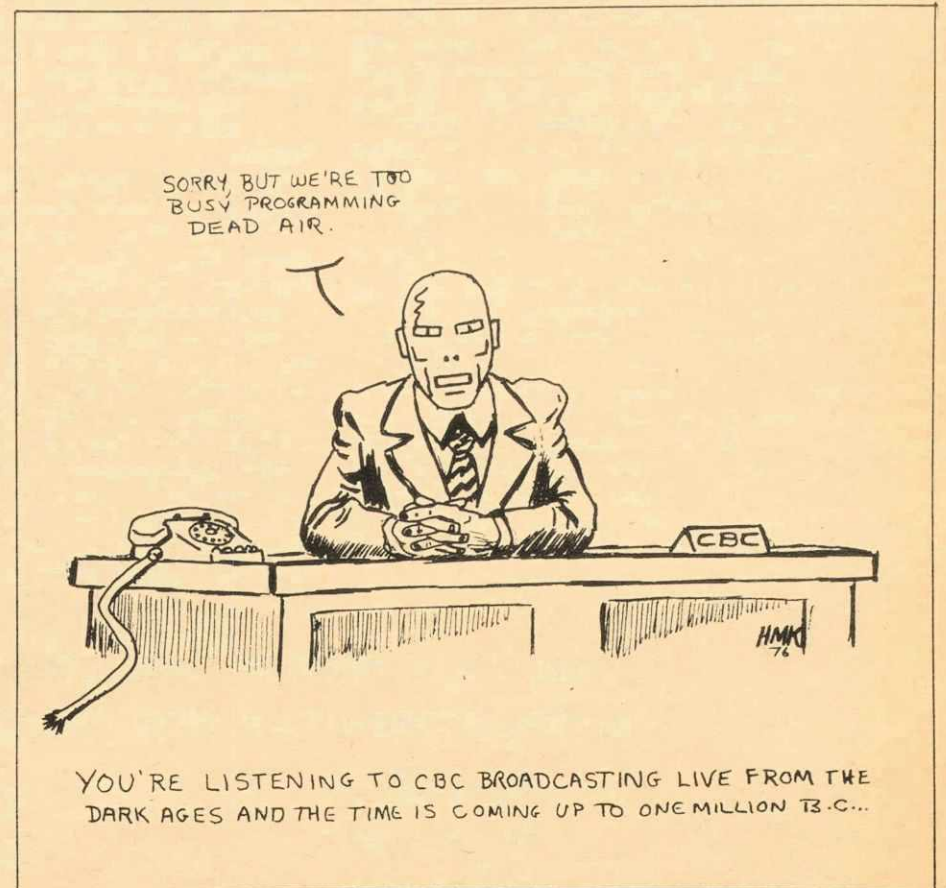
to all parts of Canada... in English and French... (and by) actively contributing to the flow and exchange of cultural and regional information and entertainment".

## THE POWER AND THE POTENTIAL OF THE BROADCASTING MEDIA

Whether you have or not, there can surely be no doubt about the power and the potential of the broadcasting media in which the CBC is functioning. Its full force is revealed most starkly, I suppose, by the fact that nearly 50% of the leisure time of Canadians is spent watching television, and about 20% listening to radio. The average Canadian - if such there be - spends three hours and twenty minutes a day watching television and something over two hours a day listening to radio. It will come as no surprise that Canadians themselves recognize the force of these media: three quarters of us acknowledge that television and radio have the ability to affect our thinking.

We know, in other words, that the television we watch and the radio we listen to, have the power to influence our values, our attitudes, our perceptions, our institutions, and even our history.

This being so, we know too, if we think about it, that it is largely the CBC - not



exclusively, of course, but to a very important extent - which must be relied upon to reflect through these powerful media **Canadian** values, **Canadian** attitudes and perceptions, and **Canadian** institutions and history.

## THE GOAL FOR CANADIAN BROADCASTERS

This, then, is the dilemma facing Canadian television broadcasting today. What are we to do about it? What is the central problem to be resolved?

The answer, it seems to me, is quite straightforward: **we in Canadian television - both public and private broadcasters - must so improve Canadian programming that Canadians will prefer to watch it rather than American programming.**

There is no other course, really. There is no point in pretending that we could roll back cablevision so as to force Canadians to watch Canadian programmes. Even if we wanted to we couldn't. Canadians are accustomed to U.S. cable and they want it. Nor is there any point, given today's broadcasting environment, in pursuing much further Canadian content rules **per se**: what is wanted is Canadian viewing of Canadian programmes, not Canadian content which - Canadians don't watch. And that it seems to me is what the Chairman of the CRTC is saying to us, in some of his recent statements.

It falls to us, then - to Canadian broadcasters - to meet this challenge. We should take it up, I suggest, and set ourselves a simple goal. It is this: our programming should become so good, and so worthy of being scheduled in prime time, that at least 50 percent of the viewing time of Canadians will come to be spent watching Canadian programmes rather than American ones. A goal so simply stated, but so difficult to achieve!

It is our mandate to lead the Canadian broadcasting industry in the production of distinctively Canadian programmes. That is why the Parliament of Canada created the CBC, and why we are financed in such large measure by public funds.

## THE OBLIGATIONS ON THE CBC

Let me conclude by saying that I quite recognize, as President of the CBC, that we must earn the right to the kind of support I am seeking. We must earn it by the effective and efficient use of the money Canadians give us, through Parliament. I believe the CBC is far more efficient than some of our critics suggest, but I intend to establish review mechanisms to ensure that this is so. We must earn the right to your increasing support

by producing distinctively Canadian programmes, not American copies. We must earn your support by remaining sensitive to the changing values and the changing social problems Canadians confront, and not succumb to the temptation to programme for ourselves, the "insiders", in the broadcasting field. We must earn your support by accepting wholeheartedly the responsibilities of a **national** broadcasting system - that of reflecting and interpreting, faithfully and with insight - when required with daring - the reality of Canada, its several regions and cultural groups, and its two major linguistic groups.

These responsibilities, these challenges, are, I am firmly convinced - even after only nine months with the CBC - fully accepted by every CBC broadcaster and technician and administrator. But we need something more - and here I should like to speak in very personal terms.

I know, too, that what I have said about CBC programming will contain no surprises to "insiders". To say we must have excellence and balance and distinctiveness and consistency is not to postulate some grand new principles. How is it then that the obstacles to realizing these principles have so stubbornly persisted?

My proposition, as a newcomer to broadcasting, is that we had better set for ourselves a straightforward target that Canadians **generally** will understand and accept. My proposition is that our success or failure as Canadian institutions should be judged on the basis of such a straightforward target.

My further proposition is that broadcasters alone will not achieve this goal. We cannot by simply searching our souls or excoriating the bureaucracy achieve the goal.

Of course we need a philosophy. Of course our programming must constantly reach down to find and renew its roots in the diversity of Canadian society.

But we need above all the support of the Canadian people. We need their sense of commitment to Canadian cultural survival and to the central part of the CBC and national broadcasting in it. We need their recognition of the price of an infinity of choice. We need their understanding that arguments over regionalism, or elitist vs populist programming, must be balanced with the imperative of cultural survival. We need their willingness to place in the same context their preferences - sometimes their demands - for an emphasis on particular kinds of programming.

It is this kind of commitment which is the condition of all else we do. That is why I have put to you the goal that I have.

## A Woman Without A Man Is Like a Fish Without a Bicycle

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Another issue that occupied NGRC's attention last year was the police repression against gays prior to the Olympic games. Last May, representatives of gay organizations were told by COJO (Committee to Organize the Olympics) employee that a directive had been circulated to the effect that 'nonconforming elements', including gays, were to be 'driven underground' in the population corridor stretching from Quebec City to Toronto.

NGRC informed the media of the frequent raids on gay clubs and baths and publicized the harassment people active in the gay movement in Canada were receiving as a result of the Olympic 'clean-up'.

### AGE OF CONSENT

At this year's conference, a heated controversy centred on abolishing age of consent laws, which would allow individuals of any age to freely engage in sexual activity. Though the resolution had passed at last year's conference, Gays of Ottawa wanted to re-open the debate.

The present laws are a blatant example of homosexual discrimination: the age of consent for heterosexuals is 16, for gays it is 21. Delegates arguing in favor of complete abolition recognize that many fourteen and fifteen year olds have been gay as long as they can remember and feel quite at ease with their sexuality and their need to express it. Abolishing these laws would let young people know that the gay movement is on their side, they say.

Those holding the minority position wanted to see the age of consent laws brought into line with those of heterosexuals.

Anti-abolitioners fear the adverse publicity that could be generated to discredit the entire gay movement when NGRC goes to the government to have the laws abolished. Fears that NGRC would come under attack for wanting laws that would encourage "fifty years old queers preying on young boys" spurred some delegates to push for a more moderate position.

The majority of delegates remained unswayed by these arguments though, and NGRC reaffirmed its position to abolish all age of consent laws.

At the lesbian workshop, the idea of creating an autonomous lesbian movement in the future was considered. According to Marie Robertson, an activist in a newly formed lesbian group, "It's time that lesbians started working directly for their own concerns. For years we've supported feminist causes and gay male causes because we were working in **their** movements, while issues that vitally concern us went unnoticed by feminists or gay men who didn't see them as priorities. We've learned from experience that nobody else is going to fight for something that doesn't concern them, nor should we expect people to fight on our behalf."

Further discussion of priorities and tactics was postponed until October when the National Lesbian Conference will meet in Ottawa, and more lesbians will have input into the discussions.