

CRTC cracks its whip

by Roger Metcalf

Private FM Radio will be required to depart dramatically from the present programming patterns of private radio, and offer a distinct choice of a higher quality and wider range of content in the areas of entertainment and information. This is the principal objective for FM radio development as set out in the Canadian Radio-Television Commission's Canadian FM Radio Policy.

To accomplish this, the Commission will propose regulations setting out comprehensive new program content categories as well as regulations calling for the provision of specified amounts of programming broadcast each day in what is termed a "foreground format", the prohibition of simulcasting except in special circumstances, a reduction in the maximum number of commercial minutes permitted in programs and the introduction of a new FM application form which will stress accountability for the broadcast service which an FM licensee proposes.

The paper further reaffirms the Commission's policy of permitting present holders of AM licences to hold FM licences in the same community. It also

recognizes the fact that each FM licensee should respond individually to the objectives of the new policy according to the needs of the service area and the resources available to him.

The CRTC policy is an answer to traditional expectations in Canada that FM offer a choice and quality of programming different from AM. The Policy insists that AM is a more than adequate source for popular music, chatter, and capsule information, and that for FM to provide more of the same is a waste of valuable public frequencies.

It is evident that to create a new style of radio requires a more varied selection of both musical and verbal programming, a different approach to commercials, an alternate style of news and public affairs and a new attitude to community service. Radio which responds to immediate tastes, and answers needs for instant information and entertainment and which enlarges understanding and deepens awareness.

To accomplish this goal, a different approach is required in the selection of material and the way programming material is

organized during the day, since most private radio is distinguished by a day-long flow of records, time and weather announcements, brief newscasts and the casual talk of radio personalities.

The Commission proposes a regulation requiring FM broadcasters to provide specified amounts of programming in what it terms a "foreground format" - that is, programs on particular subjects, prepared and presented at definite times, and displaying care and thought in the handling of both music and spoken material. Such programs would provide what has been called "islands in the sea of recordings".

At various times during the day, therefore, listeners will be assured of time periods on all FM stations in which programming in this "foreground format" will offer foreground instead of background listening - programs on specific composers, performers, or covering the development of types and styles of music; live concerts or coverage of community or other events; new background programs and so on. The Commission also foresees stations cooperating in producing programs, networks being established for others, and independent producers selling material in the "foreground format" to a number of FM stations.

Another important proposed regulation for FM concerns the maximum number of commercial minutes to be permitted. To ensure a different, less intrusive commercial environment, the Commission proposes a regulation which would lower the maximum number for the sixteen hour broadcast day.

Since the Commission is looking for creative and imaginative renewal of FM according to the needs and talents of individual communities and the resources of broadcasters themselves, it will rely on the licensing process and the promise of performance to permit the individual responses of broadcasters to the policy's intentions and to make successful FM applicants specifically accountable to the public and the Commission for the plans they make.

Specific promises will be required regarding language of broadcast, affiliation, the amount of time devoted to various content categories, plans for music and spoken word, advertising, Canada Content, use of automation, and programming format and scheduling.

Radio frequencies and public property in Canada, and persons applying to use, them are responsible to the public through the Commission for this stewardship. In this policy, a formula is provided whereby an applicant makes a public promise to offer a certain kind of service and

is held accountable by having this promise made part of his licence. The Licensee is obligated to tell the public that he has made this commitment and that it can be inspected by anyone at the station or at the office of the CRTC.

How will the Commission's policy affect those who look to FM as a "quality" music service? The Commission expects that music will remain the basic building block of the majority of FM stations. It is expected that very specialized stations such as, for example, those offering an all-news format, might develop only in those areas where there is a large number of FM stations.

The Commission intends to evaluate closely the promises applicants make regarding the type and variety of music they intend to program, and how it will be presented. There is every indication that there are audiences for a much more diverse selection of music than is currently played on most FM stations.

Student radio is only mentioned briefly in the new policy. It is classified with community radio as an experimental form which will only be permitted on a limited scale, hopefully in most localities.

Bill 22 or Catch 22

by J. Bartleby

Senator Eugene Forsey was invited to speak at the Law School last Thursday on the topic, "Is Quebec's new language bill unconstitutional?" Fortunately he did not confine himself to the professional banalities of that question, but gave us one of the best of his famous blasts at government stubbornness and petty sectionalist feelings.

For Bill 22 embodies many of the things that Forsey hates most. It gives to bureaucrats immense, unchallengeable power to interfere with the everyday life of Quebecois, both English and French-speaking. In this respect the Bill, Sen. Forsey says, speaks for (and damns) itself: it sets heavy penalties for store-signs, menus, contracts, intra-business communications, etc. which do not have a French version. And yet "the Board" - *la Regie de la Langue Francaise* - can exempt favoured people from these requirements. In this way, and in other ways, it has the power, in effect, to decide who has to be French and who doesn't. There must be a "Francophone presence" in the management of every business (whether a large corporation or a corner grocery, so it seems). Who on earth knows, for it decides the meaning of terms like this, and what it decides is final.

Only one student F.M. station presently exists. It is at Laval and has been licensed for over two years. The University of Manitoba Students' Union has attempted to receive an FM license, but so far they have been unable to get around CRTC objections to the original proposal.

It seems clear that for student station to receive an FM license it must either give up a programming policy aimed mainly at students, or else depend for its finances on fees and contributions. The CRTC appears to be unwilling to allow an FM station for students to draw commercial revenue away from the other private FM stations.

If there is to be a student FM station in the Maritimes, the most logical location would be Halifax, since there are far more post-secondary students here than in any other city. Also, despite an uneven record, the combined resources of the major student unions exceeds greatly those to be found elsewhere. It remains to be seen whether there will be any student station, or station owned by students, here. The initiative and support will have to come primarily from the members of the Dalhousie Student Union, and time is short.

Forsey illustrated the potentially absurd and unjust results of this type of bureaucratic self-sufficiency by citing the farcical Brophy case, where it was ruled that the "mother" tongue of a completely bilingual and bi-racial child was French because her mother spoke French; hence she had to go to a French school.

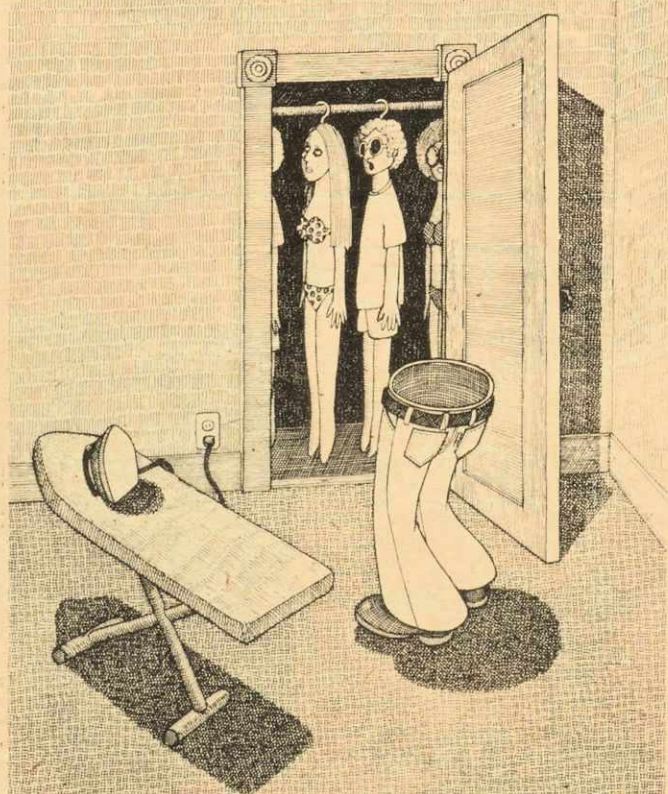
It was more than the clumsy mechanics of the Bill that upset Forsey. Clearly he was against any law that hampered the subject's right to speak and write the way he likes. The passing of Bill 22 was a reactionary move, reversing the recent Canadian trend toward bilingualism and liberal language laws; it suggested that the government of Quebec thought of itself as the only representative of French-Canadians and the representative of only French-Canadians. It imperiled the rights of English-speaking Quebecers, by no means a small group, and it would spell the "boiling in oil" of the English-language universities.

No one can listen to Sen. Forsey without being both entertained and moved by his argument. Yet I do not think in an unfair criticism to say that he is a bit one-sided, and even one-minded. Forsey himself acknowledged that the last census showed the first appreciable drop in the percent-

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