

is very different from the kind of nickel and dime involvement in specific details of programming which the hon. member for Brandon-Souris obviously favours. What should govern the basic principle behind programming policy is not, I suggest, just the taste of the mass, is not just the taste of the minority, is not the taste of the avant garde, and is certainly not the taste of the righteous. It seems to me that the CBC should attempt to present a variety of programming so that a variety of Canadians can find something on the CBC which is of interest to them.

● (1720)

The cost may be that once in a while a member of the House of Commons, or some of his friends, may be outraged at one or another program. On occasion even I may be outraged about a program. But there is a greater benefit in making sure that programming gives a choice to a large number of Canadians, whatever their disposition, so that most can find something which will interest, stimulate and entertain them.

The role of the CBC is exactly that characterized by the hon. member in a felicitous phrase. Its role is that of "chartered liberty". I point out that it was parliament which, in its wisdom, decided to establish the CBC not as a department completely under the responsibility of parliament but as a public corporation to some extent separated from the probings of parliament so that parliament would not delve into day to day details of programming and administration. It was thought—wisely, it seems to me—that a radio and television communications system should not be subject to the kind of influence or control which politicians might wish to bring to bear in the consideration of specific details. If we interfere in artistic policy, if we interfere in the details of program content, what is to stop our interfering with programs which present news, commentary or other aspects?

It is the House of Commons which decided that the CBC should have chartered liberty and that there are areas in which the House would not interfere. We were to keep our hands off the day to day administration of the corporation, the over-all direction of programming, but we could attempt to give advice and counsel. That principle is dangerously contravened by the kind of approach represented by the motion presented by the hon. member for Brandon-Souris. He would attempt to delve into administrative details which surround the presentation of the specific program about which he is concerned. That is an attempt which this House should resist.

**Mr. Jim Fleming (York West):** Mr. Speaker, I will be brief.

**Some hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Fleming:** I am glad hon. members opposite approve of brevity on my side of the House. Unfortunately, brevity of remarks on the other side is somewhat rare. To comment on this matter, this morning, as a member of the Standing Committee on Broadcasting, Films and Assistance to the Arts, I met at a general meeting the president of the CBC who appeared as a witness before the committee, and I took that opportunity to question him about this matter. I thought, since I wanted to participate in the

### *CBC Programming*

present debate before the House, that he might shed some light on the matter.

I find, when dealing with complaints of constituents and other kinds of problems, that it is best sometimes to take some of the earlier letters, block out or erase names and addresses and forward these letters when answering later letters of inquiry. I asked the president of the CBC this morning just why is he not willing to provide the information asked for now. He insisted that the problem really boiled down to a matter of principle, that people who had written in and signed their letters, had written in complete confidence, and that they have the right and the privilege to have their correspondence kept confidential; further, you could only turn over those letters to members of parliament or make them public if you had the permission of the persons who had written in and criticized.

I asked if it would not be possible to block out the name and address and particulars of the person who sent the letter because some people are afraid of reprisals if their names are connected with criticisms of radio or television programs. Revealing the names of these people might hurt their ability to earn a living or might harm their well-being or particular situation in a community. This is quite possible. For instance, people employed by a large corporation might suffer if it became known that they are critical of certain aspects of programming. If a letter is read in the House of Commons, it becomes public. I wonder how my constituents would feel if I were to say to them, "Everything you write to me with your signature on it I will circulate publicly." So I do not scoff at Mr. Picard's position.

On the other hand, I think members of parliament have the right to know what kind of criticism is being levelled at the CBC on any particular program. The president of the CBC indicated this morning that he is entirely willing to present, in summary form, the different points made and how many times they were made. I think he would go so far as to give some idea of how many complaints come from each region. I think that would answer a major part of the demand made by the hon. member's motion.

I think we all respect the way in which the CBC ought to be dealt with. It is indirectly responsible to parliament. The fact remains that if, after each drama, after each presentation, we call the producer of the show before us, if we want to find out about every phone call, about every discussion, about what every person said to the cameraman, to the co-producer and to his friends, we shall be intimidating. That is the kind of intimidation we do not want if the state-owned facility is to remain independent in thinking and express itself. We have the power to legislate. If someone is not doing his job, that person can be replaced. If someone is not carrying out his responsibilities properly then we, since we control the CBC, can see to it that the person is replaced. We can make changes short of passing legislation.

That is all I want to say, except this: this morning the president of the CBC indicated that if the hon. member wants general information, wants to know how many criticisms of each type were levelled at the corporation, that information is available. It is the names of the individuals which the president wishes to withhold. The