

Government Orders

A recent estimate places the CBC at a \$180 million shortfall over the next four years. The CBC currently has a \$45 million deficit and an operating budget of over \$1 billion. Any private business facing this kind of debt with the intent of borrowing more money would most certainly be out of business. However, it seems crown corporations act on a different philosophy, a philosophy of spending with no regard for how great the cost.

Allowing a company to accumulate further indebtedness at public expense from the overburdened taxpayers' point of view is just not right. This type of action is not conducive to cost effectiveness and is taking us down an ill-fated road.

Arguments have emanated from across the floor that the CBC is a tradition chock full of Canadian heritage and culture. That argument rings somewhat hollow, especially if we consider how many Canadians appear to be interested in tuning into the CBC.

CRTC chairman Keith Spicer recently scolded CBC executives for ignoring viewers, politicians and pundits who feel the CBC has lost touch with its audience. Mr. Spicer told the CBC executives at a licence renewal hearing that: "You're just going to batten down the hatches and bulldog forward and do what you damn well please". Spicer continued: "It's not just good enough to blindly defend every last brick, every single amplifier, every last job, or every last budget dollar for its own sake to refuse to admit that CBC can and must change".

Perhaps the change referred to is to begin privatizing the CBC. Fewer and fewer Canadians are tuning in to CBC programming which proves that the CBC must change. Only 15 per cent of television viewers watched the CBC's English network for some part of the day in the 1990-91 season. Two years later only 13.5 per cent were tuning in. Between the hours of seven and eleven, known as prime time, which is any network's bread and butter, only 15.8 per cent of viewers were watching CBC in the 1990-91 season. The percentage dropped to 13.6 per cent two years later.

These facts beg the question why are Canadian taxpayers forced to pay for something which is obviously of little interest to the majority of Canadians? The spend, spend, spend mentality of this government must stop.

Last week during the debate of Bill C-17 a government member stated that the \$25 million borrowing authority this bill would grant the CBC is a relatively small amount. Canadians are tired of hearing such rhetoric from their elected representatives.

The reason our national debt will approach the \$550 billion next year is because previous governments and now the present government continue to look at \$25 million as a drop in the bucket. Well \$25 million is not a drop in the bucket and until the

government realizes this Canada's debt problem will in all eventuality continue to grow and grow at an alarming rate.

•(1340)

The \$1.1 billion subsidy to the CBC cannot continue. To begin allowing the CBC to borrow huge amounts of money is something we cannot support. We are supporting four of the five sections into which we have broken down Bill C-17, but we do not support the CBC borrowing authority.

Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my allotted time with another member from my caucus.

Mr. John Harvard (Winnipeg St. James): Mr. Speaker, I have a couple of short comments and then a question for the hon. member.

I listened to his comments quite closely with respect to the CBC. It brings a lot of things home to me because I spent many years at the corporation.

Implicit in his remarks is the privatization of the CBC. In suggesting that, the hon. member really does not understand what public broadcasting is all about. The private networks are not interested in a lot of the things done by the CBC. The CBC carries programs like "Man Alive", "Marketplace", "The Fifth Estate" and "Meeting Place" which is the religious broadcast on television on Sundays. There is also its entire radio service.

Private broadcasters are not interested in programs of that kind for two reasons. One is that they are not that cost effective for commercial organizations. They do not draw the kinds of audiences that programs with all the violence and sex do. It is not fair to public broadcasting or Canadians to lump public broadcasting in with commercial broadcasting. They are very, very different. It is like comparing a bakery with a farm machinery company; they just do not match.

It is unfair to CBC employees when the hon. member suggests there is no bottom line at the CBC. If the hon. member had made those remarks in 1970, the year I joined the CBC, I think he would have been pretty well right. The CBC could be accused of some very serious profligate spending in 1970 but that is not the case now. Sure, you are going to find some fat, but there is no comparison to 20 or 25 years ago. Therefore, to suggest there is no bottom line is just not true.

My question has to do with the borrowing aspect of Bill C-17. Maybe \$25 million is a lot of money, maybe it is not. But as long as the borrowing is consistent with the means, that is the budget the CBC has, I do not see the concern, as long as it fits in with the budget. Why is that concern there? It is not adding to the budget; it is just one more expense item with respect to the budget.