

How DO They Get Away With It ?

INSIDE FROM THE OUTSIDE

By David Bauer

"Once more from the top, please. But this time with a little more explosion."

The man speaking was not talking about blowing up the Parliament Buildings (at least not literally), but was giving a clue as to the inner dynamics of one of CBC Radio's most popular programs, Inside From The Outside, or, as it has been known to immodestly subtitle itself, "Saturday's Satire Explosion".

The man was Jack Humphrey, the show's madcap producer-director, and he was speaking to the five veteran cast members who have performed regularly on this frenetic half hour since Inside From The Outside first saw the light of day five years ago. The occasion was the actual taping of a recent episode during which I was able to observe the extended but never boring process whereby many hours of production time finally result in the compact, non-stop format which has made the show such a success.

Satire is the name of the game and Inside From The Outside has earned a

reputation for not pulling its punches. The show strives for a topicality and a razor sharp cutting edge rarely found on the air waves. The results, needless to say, are often controversial.

The curious thing about Inside From The Outside is that despite its popularity relative to other CBC Radio programs it remains what can be called an 'underground' phenomenon. Head writer Murray Soupcoff receives a strong feedback from university communities, probably, he speculates, because of its irreverence and strongly nationalist flavour. Some universities have actually used tapes of the program to illustrate, in the classroom, the creative use of the media.

Regular CBC listeners have been supplemented by those satire connoisseurs who have been drawn to it like a magnet. And no wonder, nothing else like it is being produced anywhere in North America. Many listeners pick up the program in the U.S., and their praise is the most extravagant. "How do you get away with it?" they invariably ask.

The show's creators must ask themselves the same question, and the answer is clear: let the listeners judge what is fit to broadcast.

When the CBC administration attempted to 'cool off' the show by dumping it in an awkward time slot they were stunned into retreat by the magnitude and intensity of the uproar that ensued.

Well, enough of the show's background. What I wanted to know was 'how it done?'

When I arrived at Studio R in the ancient corridors of the radio network's Jarvis St. building in Toronto the production process was just getting under way. Some six hours later the half hour comedy 'explosion' had been packaged, with some editing still required to tighten it up for broadcast two days later. The show is heard nationally Saturday's at 11:30 a.m.

In the control room I saw the producer-director, Jack Humphrey, smoothly execute the translation of the script, the assembled work of five writers, into the zany vocal characterizations of the five cast members, augmented by the incredible sound effects of the CBC's Alex Sheridan.

Head writer Murray Soupcoff was on hand for the production as the 39 page script was brought to life. Murray must coordinate the writing of four other contributors, Eric Nicol, Gary Dunford, Dave Thomas, and Rick Salutin.

Since the writing team is geographically spread out over the country, their telephone conferences as they discuss the serious business of comedy often are acknowledged by Ma Bell with a bill in excess of \$300. The result, however, is deemed worth the expense: a tightly woven mosaic of sketches aimed at blasting away at the follies and foibles of national and international political life.

The show I saw being prepared featured a provocative carnival amusement entitled Monsieur Trudeau's Wonderful World of Inflation - yes, inflation can be fun. Also particularly acerbic was a skit centred on the theme of hypocrisy in immigration policy. However, I would offer the criticism that there were too many 'in house' jokes, references to other CBC programs or personalities which many listeners may consider rather uninteresting. In such a fast paced show, nonetheless, and the overall impact was not diluted.

My single most striking impression on the inside of

Inside From The Outside was the cool and precise professionalism of the cast. This was underlined when I discovered that they had not seen the script before that very hour. Each of the five, Max Ferguson, Barbara Hamilton, David Hughes, Judy Sinclair and Carl Banas, have cultivated a vast repertoire of vocal inflections and weird characterizations from which they were able to summon the needed effect with ease under the sway of Jack Humphrey's sweeping gestures from the control booth, gestures that often resemble an orchestra conductor gone berserk.

This year an added attraction will be Gene Taylor's 'newscasts' as Victor Voice. A Toronto based comedian and writer, Gene is heading for national indecent exposure with his stiletto sharp frenetic brand of humour.

As I left Studio R after several hours of observation on the making of Inside From The Outside I heard in the corridor behind me a receding echo, "Are we ready for the explosion?"

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1500 Deportations

Though the government of Quebec welcomes immigrants from other French-speaking countries such as France, Belgium and Switzerland, it is standing by as Canadian immigration moves to deport over 1,500 Haitians, most of whom speak French and live in Quebec.

This was but one of the charges levelled at the federal and provincial governments at a rally to protest the growing wave of deportation orders against Haitians supposedly living in Canada illegally.

The rally, organized by the Bureau de la Communauté Chretienne des Haitiens de Montreal, was attended by over 400 people.

Father Paul Dejean of the Bureau stressed that while the November 1972 immigration regulations prohibit applications for landed status from people already living in Canada, such people nevertheless have the right to legally remain in Canada pending their appeal. This right, Dejean said, has been systematically ignored by Canadian Immigration agents.

The vast majority of the Haitians now in Canada are workers. Together with workers from other immigrant groups, they work largely in non-union light industrial factories at very low wages and under very poor conditions. The fact that many Haitians either do not have legal work permits, or are unaware of their rights in Canada, several speakers pointed out, allows employers to exploit them shamelessly.

The threat of being handed over to the RCMP or to immigration agents is often wielded like a club by employers to force Haitian and other immigrant workers to accept intolerable conditions.

According to several workers who spoke, some of whom are presently facing deportation charges, immigration agents are intimidating and harassing the Haitians.

One worker cited the case of a Haitian woman who was visited at home late at night by an immigration official and given a deportation order on the spot when she refused to submit to the agent's sexual advances. Such acts of sexual exploitation of Haitian women by immigration officials are by no means rare, he added.

Other workers described illegal searches, confiscation of money and personal documents, and harassment in work places as common practice.

Speakers at the rally emphasized that the Haitian community in Montreal does not wish to confine its struggle to the immediate question of deportation.

While several speakers stressed the need for a united struggle against immigration department policies, all saw the fight as only part of a larger offensive against the Duvalier regime in Haiti. "Why should we only fight against deportations," cried one speaker, "and not against the reasons which make us leave our country in the first place!"