

*CBC Programming*

If there is one area of life today about which I am deeply concerned it is the individual freedom that we enjoy in this country and the protection of our freedom of speech, of thought, of action, of movement and of worship. I am deeply concerned that if this motion is adopted, it might prove to be an invasion of the privacy of the common citizen, an action that we might regret in the future.

I might say, Mr. Speaker, that had the hon. member for Brandon-Souris been seeking the tabling of a summary of the opinions that have been expressed to the CBC by all of its viewers and contained in all the correspondence received by the corporation, then I would have had no hesitation in supporting him in that demand. However, tabling in the House of all correspondence received, without the permission of the people who originated that correspondence is, to my way of thinking, an invasion of their privacy which would tend to suppress the free flow of opinion between the citizens of Canada and the corporation.

I should like to raise, also, the question of whether such a move would indeed be advisable from the standpoint of the private broadcasters who are part of the national network as affiliates of the CBC. I know for a fact that in our own area in western Ontario—and I know this from first-hand knowledge—a great deal of communication takes place between the viewer and the network affiliates. In other words, private stations at the end of the CBC network provide the closest link between private citizens and the corporation.

I am sure that if members of the House were working in any of these establishments on programs of a varying nature, they would know by the telephone calls that are received, not only at the station but in numerous control rooms of the various affiliate stations, that the viewing public across Canada is taking this opportunity to let its views be known to the affiliate. It would seem to me that if we are going to take a serious look at the situation, in other words get all the facts as to what the people thought of the program in question, we would have to go right down to the affiliate stations and get the full story from them.

I believe, also, that the hon. member for Maisonneuve-Rosemont (Mr. Joyal) made an extremely important observation, to be found at page 5177 of *Hansard* of April 24, 1975, when he pointed out the criteria to be applied for exemption from production of papers. He gave the following reasons: first, the papers are voluminous and, second, they would require inordinate length of time and cost to prepare. It seems to me that this reason alone is sufficient for Mr. Speaker to deny the request for correspondence to be placed before the House. Having worked in one of the network private affiliates, I can assure the House that literally volumes of correspondence are received at the private end of the corporate network on the subject of a controversial program such as the one we are discussing now.

However, my chief objection relates to the harmful effects that such action might have in the future. Where do we stop? I know that this motion is to apply to one instance only, but to my way of thinking it would be the thin edge of the wedge and once the precedent is set, the door can easily be opened not only in the case of the

network but, I submit, in the case of private stations as well. I believe that this could get us into great difficulties. While I certainly do not condone immoral or indecent presentations no matter where they take place, I believe that the House has a responsibility to make sure that its views are made known to the corporation through the Standing Committee on Broadcasting, Films and Assistance to the Arts as well as right here in this chamber. I do not believe that its authority should necessarily extend into areas of private communications between the corporation and its individual viewers.

Let me illustrate, if I may. If I were investing money in a company—and that is what we are doing in support of the CBC when we invest money of the people of Canada in one of the largest companies in the world—and if I did not have adequate expertise to run it myself, I would hire the most expert people I could find and let them get on with the job. If I were not happy with the job they were doing, I would let them know about it, which is the case in this particular instance when the displeasure of many members of the House is expressed, and also at the meetings of the broadcasting committee when it is voiced forcefully. But I do not think I would place any restrictions on a company that I owned which would burden it with regulations and demands that would not have to be met by its competitors, which I feel is what this motion would do to the corporation because there is no way in which the House could demand that the CTV network or Global television produce correspondence from their viewers.

I would also like to point out that in this instance we are dealing with a matter which requires flexibility. In reality the quality of a program is a matter of opinion, a question of cultural taste and morality which is an individual personal matter. I am sure we can agree that it is almost impossible to find two people in agreement on a subject such as this. I am sure that a great number of negative opinions were expressed to the CBC on the subject of this particular program. I am equally sure that a great number of opinions were not expressed, whether they were positive opinions or negative opinions. I am sure that hon. members realize that possibly only one person in ten will take the time, pick up a pen and take the effort necessary to make his opinions known, whether it be to the CBC, Eaton's, Simpson's or any other corporate body.

● (1710)

Even if we did have all these communications tabled, we might or might not have a precise over-all view of what the national opinion would be on that particular program. As hon. members know, the CBC—and other members of this House have put forth supporting views—has said that it was the largest audience ever assembled for a program of that kind. It was also submitted to this House that the rating for the program ran about 70 per cent, or perhaps 50 per cent or better in its favour. We can all argue that that is what the CBC says, but the fact remains that those statistics are available and I do not see that even tabling all the correspondence would give us exactly what we are looking for.

I have a great deal of affection and admiration for our democratic representation formula. I honestly believe that the best outlook for public opinion in the world today is