

*Broadcasting Act*

I want to point out to the Minister that the Canadian people do not share the Government's apparent intense dislike of public broadcasting. A 1986 Environics poll showed that over two-thirds of Canadians were in favour of increased spending on the CBC. Let me repeat that, Mr. Speaker. People want more funds for the CBC, not less, which is what has happened in the four years in which we have had a Conservative Government.

There are few very minor good things in this Bill. We are pleased to find the Government and the Minister acknowledging in this Bill that "the CBC is the principal vehicle of cultural expression in Canada". Given the views of so many of the right-wing back-benchers of the Conservative Party, many of whom would like to see the CBC disappear altogether, to get this recognition out of the Tories seems like a great victory.

We need a CBC that is capable of having an appeal to a mass audience while at the same time producing such excellent programming of enlightenment as *Ideas* or *Man Alive*. To take off the CBC live drama, music as well as documentaries demonstrates a short-sighted vision. The Government is making commercial factors the litmus test for what should and should not be on the network.

As a Member of Parliament from Winnipeg, I have to join with other Members, including I think some Members on the government side, who are not only dismayed but horrified at the real abandonment by the CBC in the area of regional programming. The standing committee detailed the problems of regional programming in its report. It pointed out that the CBC has been forced to cut 28 per cent of its resources for regional programming in order to maintain regional programming in recent years. The regional managers of CBC operations in every province have noted that in recent years they are "less able to develop new talent, present variety programming, and work with independent producers". We have heard from Winnipeg, Halifax, Hamilton, Windsor and I suppose from Vancouver about the situation.

The 1968 Broadcasting Act established that the CBC must serve the needs of the regions. This current legislation suggests that the network need only reflect the regions to its audience. This is a significant difference from what we came to expect, and it can only lead to the centralization of the CBC, which we in the regions reject completely. The role of enlightenment as well as that of regional and multicultural programming is given over to the alternative programming network. The Minister, however, was not able to secure the funds for this network from the Minister of Finance (Mr. Wilson) at this time. She promises instead another two years of studying and delay for a proposal that has already been the subject of intense analysis both by the parliamentary committee and by the Caplan-Sauvageau report. The Government has apparently ruled out a CBC role in this new service and has left it to the CRTC to work out a structure, which I believe is the responsibility of Government.

When we look at private television, Mr. Speaker, we see some very sad facts. The task force pointed out that the private sector has simply not been doing its job, as I indicated at the beginning of my speech. We should remember that the standing committee established that private television broadcasters average a 50 per cent annual return on investment. Surely they should be forced to do more than what they do. Broadcasting licences should be more than a licence to print money. Private networks have to be more than transmission belts bringing in American programs to Canadian viewers with Canadian commercials. What has the Minister done about this in her new legislation? She has watered down, it would appear, the requirement in the current Act that private broadcasters be predominantly Canadian. Instead, she has put in place a form of performance incentives. Fees will be collected in secret by Treasury Board from those private broadcasters who do not meet their requirements for Canadian programming. The money will be distributed to those who do. Rather than getting tough with private broadcasters who consistently fail to meet their conditions of licence, the Minister is offering a shoddy scheme which is fraught with difficulties.

Let me take a moment to illustrate what I have been saying with an example from Manitoba. In Manitoba we have a number of private and public television stations. Most of them are located in Winnipeg because more than half the population of Manitoba is in Winnipeg. What has happened in the last couple of years? The CRTC, for reasons which I cannot understand, gave a licence to a group to set up a television broadcasting station in Portage La Prairie, 50 miles from Winnipeg. So we have Channel 13. But what do we see from Channel 13? It is almost entirely American programming, the game shows and movies. There are some very good movies, but almost no Canadian content at all.

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Why did the CRTC issue that licence? I do not know, but part of the reason that they were able to do so is that the message they get from the Government is that it is not very concerned about Canadian content. The Canadian people are concerned about Canadian content. Sure, they want to be able to watch American programs. Sure, they want to watch American baseball games or American football games or drama or *Dallas* and all the others when they are on. However, they should have the ability to choose what they want to see.

Canadians who really believe that Canada is a separate country and needs its own culture if it is to survive and not become the fifty-first state, also believe that we need a broadcasting system, both public and private, which provides Canadian content. That is what they have seen less and less of since the Conservative Government was elected in 1984.

What we have here are a Bill and a Minister who says some of the right things, but their desire and determination to do the right thing is, in my view, to say the least, sadly lacking.