

● (9:40 p.m.)

Mr. Sherman: Mr. Chairman, I am one of those in this chamber who during the past two years or more has on several occasions had some stern and critical things to say about the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, particularly in the area of public affairs programming on television. Therefore it may surprise some members of the committee this evening to learn that I come here not to bury Caesar but to praise him.

I believe that the criticisms that have been levelled at C.B.C. public affairs programming on television during the past two years by a number of members of this chamber, including the hon. member for Elgin, the hon. member for Oxford, the hon. member for Leeds, myself and others who have spoken out, were entirely legitimate. Certainly I know they were criticisms made by those who were entirely sincere and conscientious, and I am now satisfied that those criticisms were completely constructive.

I think it is becoming apparent to an encouraging degree, albeit to a limited extent, that some of the shafts of criticism have found their target and are producing some improvements. I like to think that it is because members of the chamber, as well as members of the general public, editorial writers and members of the press, have taken it upon themselves to speak out in this area and objectively and constructively to analyse and assess what our public broadcasting service is doing, what it is achieving and where it is falling short of its legitimate aims, that these encouraging improvements, gradual and minimal as they may be, are now becoming evident in our national broadcasting programming.

I exclude myself from any participation in this exercise, but as far as the others to whom I have referred are concerned I suggest they can take some well earned satisfaction at the degree of study and application that they have brought to bear on this question. In the past little while public affairs programming in the C.B.C. television service has reflected a substantial improvement in the area of balanced programs, an area about which many of us expressed concern. I think this improvement is reflected in a general healthiness in the programming of the corporation that was not present before.

There are two cases immediately in point. I think of some excellent public affairs shows on C.B.C. television last week, one on India and another on the anatomy of communist

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espionage. I also think of what I found to be a moving experience last night when producer Beryl Fox's tribute to Bernard Fall was presented on C.B.C. television in the form of a documentary film entitled "Last Reflections on a War". Personally, Mr. Chairman, I found my exposure to that hour of documentary film a moving experience and an infinitely poignant one. I do not agree entirely with the persuasion of the film itself, but generally I thought it was a fair, objective, valuable and, as I said before, infinitely poignant contribution to the current bibliography on Viet Nam.

I did not feel that way about the first film that was produced by Beryl Fox entitled "Mills of the Gods", an award winning film which admittedly was technically and artistically excellent. I did not feel, however, that the content, philosophy, persuasion and message of that film was entirely constructive, objective, fair or balanced. However, that is my personal opinion, and I dare say that others in the country, and certainly Miss Fox herself, have a view that is opposed to mine. I thought her first documentary left something to be desired and I have said so both inside and outside the chamber.

However, Mr. Chairman, whatever shortcomings were found in the first documentary poem that Miss Fox did on Viet Nam, and whatever weaknesses and errors were there, these were more than overcome and compensated for last evening in her moving film that the C.B.C. screened last night under her production, "Last Reflections on a War". I do not believe that such a documentary could possibly have been shown on the C.B.C. network two years ago. Two years ago, even a year ago, I felt that this was the type of balance or objectivity that was desperately needed in television programming on the national network of this country but which we were failing to get because of a particular cant, slant or point of view that was being brought to international affairs as a result of certain influences that were being exerted in the programming department of the C.B.C. However, this kind of objective approach is now possible, and the documentary screened last night was a manifestation of that approach.

Some members of this house, and other people outside it who have spoken out during the last two years or more against what they felt was a serious weakness in the programming policy of the C.B.C., can now take some well deserved credit for having achieved