

THE CBC OMBUDSMAN (THE OFFICE OF JOURNALISM POLICY AND PRACTICES)

To most Canadians the existence of the CBC Ombudsman or Office of Journalism Policy and Practices has been a well-kept secret. The CBC annual report for 1989-1990 contained a brief report on the Office of Journalism Policy and Practices and its activities, but more recent annual reports make no reference to the Ombudsman or the Office. A press release of 4 June 1991 announced that the function of Ombudsman had been officially attached to the Office of Journalism Policy and Practices.

According to the 1991-1992 edition of the *CBC Fact Book*, the Office exercises its function of Ombudsman in two ways. First, it acts as a review authority in cases where a complainant is not satisfied with the response of an individual journalist, program unit or department. Second, it investigates and responds to complaints and comments addressed to the President, the Chairman or other members of the Board of Directors, or to the Ombudsman personally. To enhance the independence of the office, the Ombudsmen (an English-language Ombudsman is based in Toronto and a French-language Ombudsman in Montreal) report directly to the President and, through the President, to the Board of Directors.

Little is known about the activities of the Ombudsmen or about the way in which they conduct their investigations. The release of Mr Morgan's report on *The Valour and the Horror* seems to have caused consternation among CBC journalists, program directors and producers as much for the way in which the investigation was conducted as for the actual findings. On the basis of the Sub-Committee's files, responses to complaints addressed to the Chairman or to the President of the CBC make no reference to the existence or functions of the Ombudsman, nor do the responses prepared by public relations officials.

The Ombudsman does not seem to have become involved in the investigation of complaints about the film series until May, when the President asked him to conduct a full review and suggested that the process include consultation with qualified historians. By this time several detailed critiques of at least the Bomber Command segment were in existence, and the Sub-Committee had decided that the CBC and NFB were so unresponsive that it would have to undertake its own study. Under what circumstances does an Ombudsman have the authority to launch an investigation and contact outside authorities? Does he or she routinely receive copies of complaints and monitor their progress through the Corporation to ensure that they are treated politely, thoroughly and quickly? In the opinion of the Sub-Committee, the independence of the Ombudsman function should be strengthened and the complaint resolution process speeded up.

effect investigated by the Corporation. Accordingly, the Sub-Committee recommends that the complaint resolution process of the CBC Ombudsman be speeded up and that the

(1) "CBC's Ombudsman Report on *The Bomber and the Horror Series*", 10 November 1992.