

Radio and Television

We have reason to believe that the C.B.C. will not delay in agreeing at the same time to the request of the English-speaking people of this area, particularly in extending to this station or to the northeastern area of New Brunswick, the programs of the English network of the C.B.C.

Mr. Speaker, I am therefore happy to support the amendment moved by the Leader of the Opposition.

(Text):

Mr. M. J. A. Lambert (Edmonton West):
Mr. Speaker, on this subject of radio and television broadcasting in Canada perhaps we have had just as much in the way of speeches and material written in those other media of communication, the newspapers and magazines, as on any other subject that has been before us for a number of years. I am speaking as perhaps the only one who has intervened in this debate and who comes from a region where private radio and television has more scope than in this particular area of the country. Perhaps some of the views of the hon. gentlemen who have spoken have been coloured by that fact. I would like to draw to the attention of hon. members some of the difficulties which face those concerned with the development of radio and television in Canada.

I do not think I need to go back over the history of this subject, because references were made by the proposer of the amendment and those who followed him to the Aird commission report, the Massey commission report and finally the Fowler commission report, which pretty well indicate the history of these media. I think we must however recognize the fact that the existence of private radio and television in Canada is not the result of unfettered development as some members might have seen fit to allow, but rather some sort of controlled development. If we look at the results in this light perhaps they are a little easier to understand.

I know there are many areas in Canada where, if development of television had been less restricted, we would have better television today. We have the rather ludicrous situation in Vancouver, for instance, where the viewers in many areas are able to pick up six channels, only one of which is Canadian, and where hundreds of thousands of dollars in revenue pour across the border to United States stations simply because—or this is one of the reasons—the Canadian

[Mr. Robichaud.]

station does not have enough hours available in which to accept advertising and commercial sponsorship from the people who want to give it. I suggest the same thing applies in Toronto, Montreal and other areas. These cities could support a greater number of channels or outlets and it is not a matter of an entirely commercial outlet taking away all the advertising from the existing C.B.C. outlet.

I think the matter of attracting viewers is a question of the type of program available. After all, you cannot force a person to listen to a radio program or to view a television program against his will. There are, of course, many people who perhaps need a sort of sound conditioning—they cannot live without some sort of background noise—and they will take what is there. We have all witnessed this condition in some rural areas where smaller stations pour out hour after hour a certain type of music which is rather grating on the nerves, but still a lot of people will accept it. However, people are free to choose and if they will listen to that type of broadcasting then such programs will be sponsored.

I feel it is fallacious to suggest that simply because there exist limited channels in the Toronto area that if we turned over the remaining channels to a purely commercial organization revenue would immediately depart from the C.B.C. station. That, I think, is based on the assumption that what the C.B.C. station has to present to its viewers is not worth looking at and that its viewer rating will immediately drop and the commercial sponsors will desert it as rats desert a sinking ship. I do not accept that theory at all; I think it would be a good thing if the C.B.C. had competition in such areas. The men who are in charge of the management of these various private stations are businessmen and they have responsibilities like everyone else and they are recognized as having those capacities, so they will certainly make efforts to cater to the public and make their product a saleable one. As in so many other things the matter of radio and television content is a matter of selling to the public and I would say the best sales attraction for these media would be quality and then service.

I have one further observation to make in connection with the question of private and public television stations. Based on my somewhat cursory knowledge from visiting and participating in programs at both types of stations, I am astounded at the number of personnel in private radio stations compared with those at C.B.C. stations for the same type of program. It is almost incomprehensible. One cannot understand why so many