

Adjournment Debate

act. This persecution is inevitably a cause of friction in east-west relations today. The minister proposed a CSCE experts' meeting or some high level meeting to discuss the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms which are reaffirmed in principle No. 7 of the Final Act and the application of those rights in basket No. 3 dealing particularly with the question of the freer movement of people among participating states.

I have made the preceding remarks to indicate to Canadians the importance of the CSCE conference being held presently in Madrid and my great disappointment that our own Crown corporation, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, did not see fit to send even one reporter to cover this conference.

In reply to my question and concern, the Secretary of State and Minister of Communications (Mr. Fox) answered in this House that the CBC entered into an agreement with Visnews which is a European news-gathering agency. Mr. Speaker, Canadians want to hear a Canadian viewpoint of this conference, not a European one.

Canadians are fed up with getting news secondhand, either through American or European news-collecting agencies. When taxpayers pay the money they do to have a publicly owned media, they expect better service than what they have been getting to date. I again put my question to the Minister of Communications: what steps does he propose to take to ensure that the remainder of the conference will get better coverage than it has received in the first two weeks of its deliberations?

Mr. Roger Simmons (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of State for Science and Technology and Minister of the Environment): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Secretary of State and Minister of Communications (Mr. Fox) and his parliamentary secretary, who are unavoidably absent tonight, I should like to respond to the hon. member for Parkdale-High Park (Mr. Flis). I thank him for bringing this matter to the attention of the House. He is quite right in stressing the importance of the Madrid conference which is being watched with interest throughout the world. It is to my friend's credit that he raised the issue at this time.

I do not think I need to remind members of the House of the arm's length relationship between the government and the CBC. While the Minister of Communications reports to Parliament for the CBC, he does not interfere in the day to day management of the corporation. I am sure all members are in agreement with this policy, especially in the area of news services.

However, as the minister undertook in the House yesterday, this question has been pursued with the CBC management. In response to the minister's inquiries, the CBC examined its coverage of the conference and informed the minister as follows. As far as English television is concerned, the decision was made not to assign a reporter to Madrid for two reasons. The first was that all the coverage which would be needed was available to the CBC through Visnews, the world's foremost agency in the field of television news. By the way, the CBC is a founding member of Visnews which was formed by a number

of broadcasting agencies specifically to provide television coverage of international news events. In this way individual broadcaster's resources are not stretched by having to assign reporters or film crews to an event which is already fully covered. Visnews provides pooled coverage of the conference which is available to all its member organizations. Within that context it was felt by CBC that as the conference lasts for many weeks, and no one could be spared for that length of time, the Visnews service would be adequate for network purposes.

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During the first week of the conference in Madrid, "The National" carried four stories, first a scene-setter from Mark Phillips in London using film footage from Visnews and Eurovision of the delegates gathering. For three successive evenings after this, "The National" carried footage by satellite from Europe and voice-over reports from speeches by the Secretary of State (Mr. MacGuigan) and the chief delegates from the United States and the Soviet Union. The English television service is monitoring the work of the conference closely with the help of its London bureau and will resume the story as warranted by events.

On English radio 19 separate items on the conference were carried on network newscasts between November 10 and 16. There is no CBC reporter in attendance but reports have been taken from the BBC, NBC and freelancers. English radio's current affairs section carried interviews about the conference on "As it Happens" and "Sunday Morning." Also, commentary on the meeting featured Jim Cutler, law professor at McGill University and lawyer for Soviet dissidents.

Coverage on the French services is being greatly hampered by the strike of their journalists in Quebec, but the radio service has, as well as carrying a pre-conference item, included in its information programs a number of items about the conference.

Mr. Speaker, the conference has a long way to go. The CBC feels its news staff must exercise judgment in deciding which parts of the proceedings to report. The hon. member for Parkdale-High Park can be assured that his comments tonight will be noted by CBC management and the Minister of Communications will make a point of bringing them to the attention of the president of the CBC.

In conclusion, on behalf of the minister, I would like to thank the hon. member for Parkdale-High Park for raising this important issue.

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT—RENEWAL OF FEDERAL-PROVINCIAL FUNDING—GOVERNMENT POSITION

Mr. Bill Blaikie (Winnipeg-Birds Hill): Mr. Speaker, my remarks tonight deal with the question I asked the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Miss Bégin) on November 4 about the meaning of the words in the second last paragraph on page 13 of the budget paper in which the Minister of Finance (Mr. MacEachen) claims that he expects significant