

Ottawa Report CBC cuts are justified

Last week the CBC ran face-first into a brick wall.

The network's reporters scooped their own chairman who was ready to announce that \$108 million worth of budget cuts were about to be made. In the wake of all this 1,200 jobs will be going, and a number of local TV news shows will be off the air.

CBC television will concentrate on regional, national and international stories. CBC radio will pull out of international news and beef up its local news coverage.

Why did this happen? CBC management had a long list of reasons, but the major two were government cut-backs and a big drop in advertising revenues.

The fall-out was inevitable. Critics of the government accused the Tories of having an agenda to systematically attack the institutions which hold Canada together. They link the CBC cuts with cuts to VIA rail service and the proposed sale of Petro-Canada. They say the government is dismantling Canada's assets and making us easier pickings for the evil Yankees.

It's a powerful argument. Powerful because it's emotional. Last week on the front of the Ottawa Citizen was a drawing of a wounded beaver bleeding blood in the shape of a maple leaf. The Toronto Star editorial page showed the federal communications minister blowing up the CBC logo.

On a TV show at the end of the week I found myself under attack by a Liberal and an NDPer who said "you people are out to destroy Canada."

Well, for the record, that's not why I ran to be an MP. Also, for the record, I hope there are more cuts coming. I hope the government finds ways to stop spending extra billions, just not millions. If we love this country, that's the way we'll have to save it.

Garth Turner
MP

Halton-Peel
PROGRESSIVE
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Let's look at CBC for a minute. This year you and I, as taxpayers, will hand over \$1,030,000,000 to the corporation (that's \$1.3 billion). This is 5 per cent more than last year. Some cutback.

Now, if this billion-dollar corporation can't balance its books, should the taxpayer run in again and hand over another \$108 million?

I wish all those crying the blues could come and see the CBC in operation.

In Ottawa, for example, there are usually four separate CBC crews to cover each event - French television, English radio, French radio and English television. On budget night it is not uncommon to see two or three CBC tractor trailers on Parliament Hill, and up to 20 other CBC vehicles. One night I saw CBC put up floodlights big enough to illuminate the whole Parliament buildings - so the reporter would have a good backdrop for the camera.

There are more than 90 CBC reporters in the Ottawa press gallery, compared to 20 for CTV. There's a new multi-million dollar CBC headquarters going up in downtown Toronto. And there's the refusal of CBC radio to try and defray its operating costs by selling advertising.

Finally, when a Calgary businessman last week offered to buy the TV station that CBC was

closing, CBC boss Patrick Watson refused saying he didn't want to end up having "American crap" on the air at night.

Maybe the CBC is a symbol of something other than the glue that holds the country together. Maybe it's a symbol of what's been wrong with Canada - what threatens it.

We have been pursuing things that we cannot afford. More than \$300 million of the money we give CBC every year is borrowed - and added to the country's debt. And as that debt grows, so does the interest on it. Then, the next year, we have even less money to spend.

It's a vicious circle which threatens our country. At what point do we not have enough money to fund our basic social programs? Right now almost 40 cents of every tax dollar gets flushed away in interest.

And yet, when the CBC cuts back to live within its bloated budget, we hear these cries of patriotism - along with allegations that Tories are deliberately trying to tear national institutions apart.

Do you love Canada more if you let it get mortgaged to the Germans and the Japanese?

Is it better for the country to live on borrowed time, every year having less ability to set our own interest rates or levels of social support or clean up the environment?

The beaver may be bruised up a bit - with more bruises to come. But at least the national rodent has his head out of the mud.

I'm for more cuts, lower government spending, selling-off of more assets, a lower deficit, paying off the debt and then getting lower taxes.

The Globe and Mail, by the way, is cutting its sports staff in half, because advertising is also down.

Do you figure the feds should bail the paper out?
Nah, me neither.

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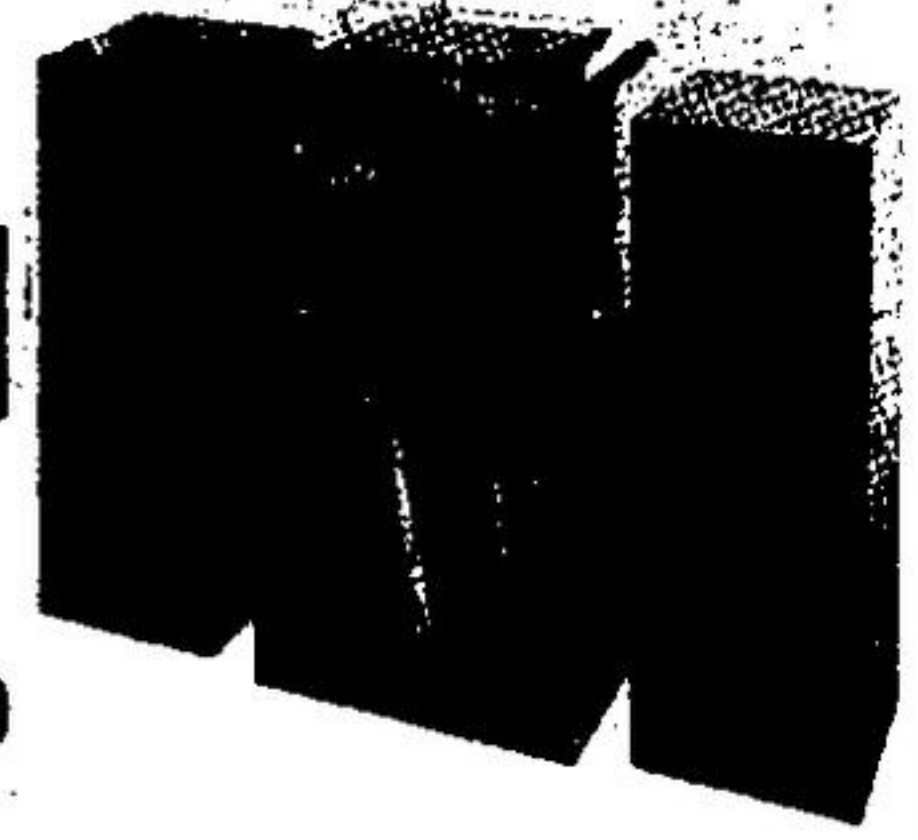
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