

CBC Television needs an overhaul

Although the recent dispute between CBC management and the Canadian Media Guild is over, the public broadcaster's problems are not.

Before I dissect the CBC's problems and suggest potential solutions, let me tell you where I stand on the CBC. I am committed and always have been to the CBC's role as a public broadcaster. Indeed, in 1932 it was a Conservative government under Prime Minister Bennett that created the Canadian Radio Broadcasting Commission (CRBC), the forerunner to the CBC. The CBC has had a historical role in promoting Canadian voices and linking the disparate and often remote parts of the country together. It is a role today no less vital.

However, while many parts of the corporation are meeting their public broadcasting mandate, others are not. RDI, the CBC's French language network, is generally meeting its mandate; French-Canadian programming is pervasive on both the radio and television side of RDI (although the recent "dumbing down" of French language programming, exemplified in the decision to replace its supper time newscast with lighter programming is cause for concern).

CBC Radio One and Two are also generally meeting their mandates as public broadcasters; while one may take issue with editorial direction and a "Toronto-centric" bent on Radio One and Two, both deliver non-commercial Canadian programming to a wide audience. Likewise with CBC Newsworld; it too is generally meeting its public mandate to provide news and information from a Canadian point of view.

However, the biggest part of the CBC, CBC Television, is also its biggest problem.

PARLIAMENT HILL REPORT



Mike Chong

CBC Television accounted for 40 per cent of the \$873 million that Parliament gave the CBC last year, and despite this money CBC Television is clearly not meeting its public broadcasting mandate. There are too many commercials and not enough relevant programming. These commercials are needed to pay for expensive Hollywood shows (like *The Simpsons* which has nothing to do with Canadian culture and content) and for expensive sport broadcasts like *Hockey Night in Canada* (which private broadcasters resent, since the CBC outbids them for hockey rights using taxpayer dollars).

As a result, CBC Television has been acting like a private commercial broadcaster: chasing ratings and advertising dollars in a vicious cycle that produces mediocre programming no different than any other station on the dial. For these reasons, CBC Television needs to be overhauled so that can meet its public broadcasting mandate.

In our next column, we'll look at some solutions to fix these problems.

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(This is the first in a two-part series on the CBC.)

—Mike Chong is the MP for Wellington-Halton Hills

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