PRESS COUNCIL, cont.

ad from a gay periodical; has criticized The Canadian Magazine for not paying more attention to a complaint from Kapuskasing's mayor that an article about the town misrepresented the facts and was misleading; took a swing at the Ottawa-Carleton regional planning committee for not drafting its official plan in open sessions (this was a result of a complaint from the Ottawa Citizen, the first complaint by a member paper against an organization attempting to restrict public information, dismissed a complaint by a reader against the Toronto Star on the grounds he did not "substantiate his accusation of inaccuracy and misrepresentations".

Perhaps not a banner year or an auspicious start but then, you have to start somewhere.

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CAN THE CBC BE SPOTLESS? by Bruce Rogers

Radio and Television service are not free. The citizen pays whether the service is tax supported or paid for by advertising. But the argument continues about commercials on CBC. Now the debate over advertising is a heated one, even behind CBC executive office doors.

Some Canadians argue that rating concerns and the cost-per-thousand yardstick compromise the CBC's ability to serve the country in accordance with the mandate. Others fear the influence of the advertiser on program content. Many simply object to the gross importunings and program interruptions. Most recently the debate has focused on the impact of messages directed at children.

Private broadcasters have said for years that CBC should get out of the commercial field. In May 1973 Keigh Campbell, CTV Executive Vice President, suggested CBC should get out of commercial broadcasting. Of course, either way there are implications for programming.

If CBC did not carry advertising it could probably not afford to offer many of the light entertainment programs whether home-grown or imports unless its parliamentary grant was increased.

In areas where the only service provided is CBC, listeners and viewers would find their choices limited. Where CBC serves via privately-owned affiliates, CBC service would be reduced as local private outlets would buy their own low cost, mass audience shows to sell to local advertisers. Remember, most CBC TV network stations are actually privately-owned affiliates and their prime purpose is profit and dividends for shareholders.

Back in 1950 the Parliamentary Committee on Broadcasting recognized "...the need for... some proper and adequate system of financing Canadian television development." The development took place. The proper and adequate system of financial support is still a matter of debate.

In 1953, one year after TV began in Canada, it was recognized that news could not be met by the old one dollar radio license fee. It was abolished. An excise tax on TV and radio receivers was one source of revenue. The only others are grants from Parliament (about four-fifths in the fiscal year 1972-73) and advertising revenue (about one-fifth). On a per capita basis commercials on CBC today save Canadians about $2.40 a year per person. But either way, Canadians pay the bills.

Unlike the self-governing BBC which operates on a ten year charter and long term grants, CBC goes hat in hand to parliament each year. Nor is the CBC self-sufficient in transmitting-stations. The crown corporation needs those private affiliates to get even minimum public service to Canadians.

In May, 1973, President Laurent Picard announced CBC's intention to remove all commercials from the English and French radio networks by January, 1974, except for special programs like NHL hockey and the Metropolitan Opera. That means clearing the radio network of virtually all advertising at a cost of only 13 cents per person plus the cost of filling the extra minutes thus gained by programming. A test run has been underway at GEO in Ottawa since June, 1973.
CBC, cont.
The results of the spotless programming there are now being evaluated.

Of the total national radio budget for the 1972-73 fiscal year, $45,092,000, only $2,803,000 was produced by ad revenue. But in television about one-third of the $150,628,000 spent on programs, distribution and transmission of the service came from advertising sales. Even so, many Canadians would like to see an end to commercials on CBC TV. Even inside CBC there are those (and they are not just producers and performers) who see a commercial-free CBC as at least a long range goal if not imminent or inevitable. The lines have been drawn and the discussion is heating up.

CBC radio may soon be "spotless" but in television, where the revenue loss would be about fifty million dollars a year, it may take a little longer. Canadians and Parliament must decide if they'll pay for the national service in taxes. Or, as consumers, will we pay extra for goods and services in order to pay for advertising and incidentally for television service?

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MUST WE BE ANXIOUS ABOUT THE FUTURE? by Barrie Zicker

Three major shortcomings afflict media coverage of the future, in my view. There is too little; it is fragmentary, and the fragments are mainly doomsday warnings and romanticized snippets about possible future technology (chiefly in medicine and transportation). The large realities are almost entirely missing.

I deliberately refer to "coverage" of the future. Some argue you can't "report" the future because "the future can't be known." True, the precise "when" and "what" of the future are fitting subjects for the astrologer and tasseur reader.

You cannot tell me, without elaborate ballistics equipment, precisely where and when a ball I throw into the air will land. But you can tell some important things about that ball: that it will go up for a while, then slow in its rate of ascent, then stop and begin to fall, at an increasing rate of descent, until it hits the ground.

Similarly a great deal is known about the future. We don't know exactly when the oil and gas and coal will run out, but they will. The same with all the other non-renewable resources.

Technology will solve each shortage as it arises? Well, insofar as people believe that, it is but another indication of how poorly the media have been reporting the future.

I have met college graduates who do not know the difference between the birthrate and the number of births, even though population is one of the most important constituents and determinants of our future. Because Canada's birthrate is at present declining, they believe the population of Canada is decreasing! Surely this kind of misunderstanding is a rotten foundation on which to base one's personal decisions about the future, let alone political decisions as a citizen. The press -- and I watch the press closely on the subject of population -- seldom makes such elementary distinctions clear.

Probably the finest reporting on the future has been by TV public affairs producers. The 52 "Here Come The Seventies" programs created by Nobel Letterman Productions Ltd. are the outstanding example. Recently CBC-TV's "The Nature of Things" devoted an hour to a program written by Bruce Martin explaining the nature and purposes of the Club of Rome, a group of fewer than 100 men and women from various countries and disciplines who are highly concerned about "man's predicament." The club studies the predicament and tries to publicize its findings. The best-known of the club's reports is the Potomac Associates paperback "The Limits to Growth."

Radio, with the exception of CBC-FM, has to my knowledge ignored the future, although the subject lends itself to radio treatment. Magazines are better, although they seldom