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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Fighting for our future



I've just returned from Nashville, Tennessee where I addressed over 500 AFTRA (American Federation of Television and Radio Artists) members at their 59th National Convention. I took the opportunity to introduce them to a different perspective on the so-called 'runaway production' issue... the Canadian perspective. When I spoke of the grim state of our domestic film and television production industry and the extent to which our cinema and TV screens are dominated by non-Canadian content, I felt the room warming up. The assembled broadcasters, singers and actors were shocked by the statistics: 99.8% of our English language movie screens exhibiting foreign-produced features; only four hour-long Canadian drama series still on the air. Believe it or not, the room was also sympathetic when I asserted that the few quality-acting jobs that come to Canada with U.S. service production are legitimately ours.

I was approached after my speech by dozens of performers who confessed they had no idea our industry was in such trouble and that they now had a different point of view on 'runaway'. One AFTRA member insisted that U.S. citizens would "riot in the streets" if their entertainment and culture were so thoroughly dominated by another nation. All offered words of support and encouraged ACTRA to keep up the fight to rebuild our industry. And of course, that's what we've been doing.

One of our most successful efforts of the past few months was ACTRA's Lobby Day in Ottawa. Some of our busiest members made the time to help us take our message about Canadian production to the Nation's Capital. Our contingent included Nicholas Campbell, Peter Keleghan, Gordon Pinsent, Leah Pinsent, Julie Stewart, R.H. Thomson, Fiona Reid, Richard Hardacre, Christie MacFadyen, Tyrone Benskin and Paul Gross. We were granted unprecedented access to MPs, party leaders and Prime Ministerial hopefuls. While on Parliament Hill, we secured many commitments. We'll be holding our leaders to their words.

Another success is the partial restoration of the Canadian Television Fund (CTF). ACTRA lobbied tirelessly to have the Liberal government reconsider its federal budget cut of \$25 million to the CTF and met with Finance Minister Manley three times to argue our point. In the end, \$12.5 million was given back, an advance on next year's envelope. It was half of what was cut, half of what we asked for, but perhaps enough to save several shows and the livelihoods of those who create them.

As we continue to fight for our future, we are also taking time to pay tribute to our past as we celebrate ACTRA's 60th Anniversary. Events across the country are allowing members to pause and reflect on how far we've come. In addition to celebrating the creative achievements of our members, our branches are also honouring those members whose time, energy and passion have been so critical in building the formidable 21,000 member organization that stands today. From those whose passion sparked the formation of the Association of Canadian Radio Artists in 1943 to our current wealth of dedicated members, we continue to fight for Canadian performers and the protection of our national culture. With such resources, I have no doubt we'll succeed.



Thor Bishopric