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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

by Ferne Downey

Our TV: The fight of the decade

December 2009 - For the last two weeks of November the federal regulator held court with hearings to decide the future of our Canadian TV industry. Our fate rests in their hands - will the CRTC seize this moment of opportunity to take a bold and creative approach to content? Will we see private broadcasters kick their addiction to U.S. shows and invest in Canadian stories in prime time?

We've been waiting for this chance to rebuild our industry for 10 long and lean years. It's time to be unabashedly proud of our TV industry, and for the CRTC to make sure there is space for Canadian shows. ACTRA's solution includes making English-language conventional broadcasters spend at least 6% of their gross revenues on scripted drama and comedy and air a minimum two hours of original Canadian drama in prime time. This would serve the interests of our industry as a whole - not just one or two powerful players.

By law we are promised a wide range of Canadian choices within the Canadian broadcasting system - the Broadcasting Act says so in clear language. Yet private broadcasters have filled our public airwaves with predominantly U.S programming and have accelerated their cross border shopping spree every year for a decade. Last year they spent \$740 million on U.S. and foreign programming and just \$54 million on Canadian English-language drama. Shame. It is time the CRTC forced broadcasters to meet their obligations by re-establishing Canadian Programming Expenditures. When they were removed in the disastrous TV Policy of 1999 we saw what happened - broadcasters behaved badly and produced the minimum CanCon required of them.

On November 16, ACTRA's National Day of Action, we sat in the front rows on that first day of CRTC TV policy hearings. We bore witness to Chair Konrad von Finckenstein's opening remarks and were heartened. Then we heard CTVglobemedia president Ivan Fecan make his pitch - one that carried little favour with the leading actors in the room and even less with the CRTC Chair. On the first break we moved next door to a press conference where performers made our pitch to a jam-packed room of TV cameras. I am happy to report that media coverage was extensive.

As actors in Halifax, Winnipeg, Regina and Edmonton held events in support of ACTRA's Day of Action, a large contingent of our Ottawa-based members welcomed five busloads of highly-motivated colleagues from Toronto and Montreal. WOW. Our flags waved jauntily amid our placards in a beautiful blue sky as we trooped from the National Arts Centre to the steps of Parliament Hill. Rock'n roll hero Gordie Sampson lent his infectious and energizing music to the rally, courtesy of our friends at AFof M Canada.

The high-energy outpouring of passion just accelerated from there as high profile actors took to the rally stage on Parliament Hill to express their personal passion for the fight for Canadian content on our TV. Tyrone Benskin, Nick Campbell, Jackson Davies, Mark McKinney, James McGowan, Carlo Rota, Zaib Shaikh, R.H. Thomson, and Tonya Lee Williams lent their hearts and souls to the rally. Three young cast members from *Degrassi: The Next Generation*, Charlotte Arnold, Jamie Johnston and Dalmar Abuzeid became the centre of our hopefulness in so many ways. They underscored beautifully the opportunity we have here. There is no shortage of talent in this country.

Our television industry is 52 years old, it has matured. Yet too many of the brightest Canadians, especially



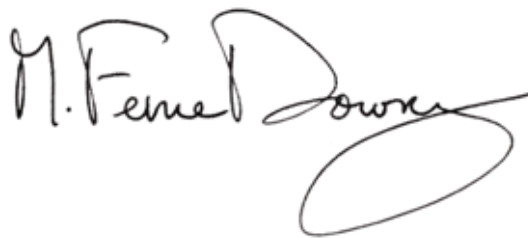
the younger ones who have been through the devastation of the past 10 years, have had to take their skills elsewhere to make a living and find creative opportunities. We need to seize this moment of opportunity so our talent will stay to serve and create shows for a Canadian TV industry that is poised to explode in ambition, reach and profitability.

The rally was completely thrilling and I am deeply grateful for the commitment of so many engaged members who travelled to Ottawa to participate and those who held events in their own cities across the country.

Before the sun was down on the day, we still had yet more adventures to embark upon - evening television and radio interviews and the first round of meetings with MPs. Over the course of two intense days we had 60 meetings with MPs, five Ministers (including the Minister of Finance), the Chairs of a number of key committees as well as all of the party critics for Heritage and critics for Finance and Industry. In addition to our scheduled meetings, an additional 30 MPs, including the Heritage Minister, attended our evening reception and spoke with many of our performers. It is safe to say that our message was well delivered by our extremely articulate band of lobbyists. It was a great time thanks to all the members who participated and our brilliant staff who made the magic happen. It was inspiring in the extreme.

A week later I returned to Ottawa, this time with Nicholas Campbell, Wendy Crewson, Stephen Waddell and Joanne Deer for our own presentation before the CRTC. (You can view it on CPAC - we were fourth up on Wednesday, November 25 if you are a CPAC devotee.) And that, my friends, kicked it up even a notch higher. We will leave no stone unturned in our vigorous campaign for Canadian drama and we will keep you apprised of all the news as the story unfolds. If you are thinking about ways we can deepen and enrich the campaign, send your ideas along to me at fdowney@actra.ca. You can always 'get on the bus' metaphorically.

In solidarity,



Ferne Downey
President, ACTRA National

ARCHIVES OF PRESIDENT'S MESSAGES

- [November, 2009 - Our TV](#)
- [October 1, 2009 - President's Video Message](#) (video)
- [August 25, 2009 - Blame greed for your cable bill blues](#)
- [August 2009 - Common Cause](#)
- [June 2009 - Fuelled with Optimism and Dreaming Big](#)