



**Notes for a Presentation to the
House of Commons Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage
Thursday, 9 May 2002**

THOR BISHOPRIC:

THANK YOU MR. CHAIRMAN AND MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE. ACTRA WELCOMES THIS OPPORTUNITY TO SPEAK WITH YOU TODAY ON BEHALF OF THE 18,000 PROFESSIONAL PERFORMERS IT REPRESENTS. WE ARE THE PEOPLE YOU SEE AND HEAR WHEN YOU WATCH AND LISTEN TO ENGLISH-LANGUAGE CANADIAN MOVIES, TELEVISION SHOWS, AND OTHER RECORDED MEDIA. WE THOUGHT WE WOULD BRING ALONG EARPLUGS, AND MUFFLES FOR THE DIVISION BELLS: SO, MR. CHAIRMAN, WE HAVE THESE AVAILABLE IF THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF NOVEMBER 27TH AND APRIL 18TH RETURN TODAY.

I AM A FULL-TIME ACTOR, NARRATOR, WRITER AND DIRECTOR FROM MONTREAL, WHO SPENDS FAR TOO MUCH TIME AS THE VOLUNTARY ELECTED PRESIDENT OF THE NATIONAL UNION. R.H. THOMSON IS ONE OF CANADA'S MOST DISTINGUISHED ACTORS. ROBERT IS ALSO A WRITER, DIRECTOR AND BROADCASTER. HIS FILMOGRAPHY AND TELEVISION AND THEATRE CREDITS ARE EXTENSIVE, AND HE IS THE RECIPIENT OF MANY PRESTIGIOUS AWARDS FOR HIS WORK. GARRY NEIL IS ACTRA'S POLICY ADVISOR.

YOU HAVE NO DOUBT COME TO REALIZE OVER THE PAST YEAR HOW MUCH YOU ARE ATTEMPTING TO ACCOMPLISH IN THIS REVIEW OF CANADIAN

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BROADCASTING. THE ISSUES ARE MANY AND INTERRELATED, THEY ARE INTIMATELY LINKED WITH BROADER ECONOMIC AND GLOBAL ISSUES, AND THE WHOLE MIX IS CHANGING RAPDILY. THE CHANGE IS SO RAPID THAT, WHILE WE STAND BY WHAT WE PUT FORWARD IN OUR WRITTEN BRIEF, WE CAN TELL YOU OUR OWN THINKING HAS DEVELOPED SINCE LAST SUMMER.

WHAT WE HAVE RELUCTANTLY CONCLUDED IS THAT IT IS NOW TIME TO ADMIT THAT WE HAVE FAILED. AFTER HALF A CENTURY OF GOVERNMENT SUPPORT MEASURES FOR CANADIAN TELEVISION AND AN EVEN LONGER PERIOD OF SUPPORT FOR MOVIES, IT REMAINS VIRTUALLY IMPOSSIBLE FOR ME TO FIND A CANADIAN STORY ON EITHER THE BIG SCREEN OR SMALL. INCREASINGLY, THE WORK OPPORTUNITIES OF R.H. THOMSON, THOR BISHOPRIC AND EVERY OTHER CANADIAN ACTOR ARE BEING FOUND IN PRODUCTIONS THAT ARE NOT CANADIAN, THEY DO NOT REFLECT OUR WORLDVIEW, THEY DO NOT PASS ALONG OUR VALUES. ENTERTAINMENT PROGRAMS FROM OTHER COUNTRIES DOMINATE OUR AIRWAVES AND OUR CINEMAS. YET, ENTERTAINMENT PROGRAMS ARE THE MOST WATCHED FORM OF PROGRAMMING AND THE MOST CULTURALLY SIGNIFICANT.

OUR FAILURE TO CAPTURE THE EYES AND EARS OF CANADIANS FOR OUR STORIES IS NOT BECAUSE WE DON'T HAVE THE TALENT TO PUT TOGETHER HIGH QUALITY, POPULAR PROGRAMS. IT'S NOT BECAUSE WE LACK THE RESOURCES. WE JUST DON'T HAVE THE WILL.

OUR FAILURE RESULTS FROM A NUMBER OF FACTORS--

- THE CBC IS MIRED IN ITS BUREAUCRACY, THE NFB IS A MERE SHELL
- PRIVATE BROADCASTERS PROSPER BY BRINGING US SLICK U.S. SHOWS THAT ARE DUMPED INTO CANADA, THEY BROADCAST AS LITTLE CANADIAN MATERIAL AS THEY CAN GET AWAY WITH
- INDEPENDENT PRODUCERS REQUIRE FOREIGN PARTNERS TO COMPLETE THEIR FINANCING

- INADEQUATE CANADIAN CONTENT RULES REWARD PRODUCTIONS THAT ARE MADE PRIMARILY FOR A FOREIGN MARKET, WITH A CREATIVE IMPETUS THAT IS NOT CANADIAN
- INDUSTRY CONSOLIDATION CREATES GIANTS THAT FEEL LITTLE OBLIGATION TO CANADIANS
- AND THE CRTC RETREATS FROM STRINGENT CONDITIONS OF LICENCE AND STRONG REGULATIONS.

FOLLOWING A PROLONGED PERIOD OF FINANCIAL GROWTH AND ARTISTIC DEVELOPMENT, CANADA'S FILM AND TELEVISION INDUSTRY REACHED A PLATEAU IN THE LAST DECADE. OUR INDUSTRY WAS SET TO EXPLODE ONTO THE CONSCIOUSNESS OF CANADIAN AND GLOBAL AUDIENCES. BUT WE DID NOT MAKE THAT LEAP AND SINCE, HAVE WITNESSED A DECLINE IN OUR CAPACITY AND WILL TO PRODUCE CANADIAN PROGRAMS.

R.H. THOMSON

OUR DECLINE IN PRODUCTION IS ALSO LINKED TO THE DISTORTING FORCES OF ECONOMIC GLOBALIZATION. OUR POWERFUL FRIEND TO THE SOUTH HAS INCREASING DOMINATION OF AUDIOVISUAL MARKETS WORLDWIDE. THEIR DOMINATION OF THE CANADIAN MARKET HAS ALWAYS MADE IT ECONOMICALLY DIFFICULT TO MARKET OUR OWN PRODUCTIONS. AND THE PUBLIC POLICIES AND PUBLIC PROGRAMS WE NEED TO COUNTER-BALANCE THIS CULTURAL HOMOGENIZATION ARE INCREASINGLY AT RISK FROM INTERNATIONAL TRADE AGREEMENTS. THE CONDITIONS OF TRADE ENTRENCHED IN THESE AGREEMENTS WERE NEGOTIATED BY PARTIES WHO WERE EITHER CONTENT WITH, OR BLIND TO, THE POLITICAL REPERCUSSIONS THAT COME WHEN ELECTED GOVERNMENTS ARE BOUND WITH RULES OF EXTERNAL TRADE.

THOSE POLITICAL REPERCUSSIONS FOR ROBERT AS A CITIZEN ARE THAT THE POWERS OF MY ELECTED GOVERNMENTS ARE DIMINISHED AND MY

DEMOCRATIC RIGHTS ARE DOWNGRADED. THE REPERCUSSION FOR ROBERT AS AN ARTIST IS THAT THE CULTURAL MEASURES WHICH SUCCESSIVE CANADIAN GOVERNMENTS HAVE PUT IN PLACE FOR THE LAST TWO GENERATIONS, MEASURES WHICH WERE IN A LARGE PART RESPONSIBLE FOR REMARKABLE ACHIEVEMENTS IN WRITING, PUBLISHING, BROADCASTING, FILM PRODUCTION, TELEVISION PRODUCTION AND OTHER ARTISTIC ENTERPRISES, THESE CULTURAL MEASURES ARE REGARDED BY THE TRADE LIBERALIZATION LOBBY AS EITHER TRADE BARRIERS, OR “TRADE DISTORTING SUBSIDIES.”

SINCE 1988 AND THE FIRST FREE TRADE AGREEMENT, CANADIAN ARTISTS HAVE WATCHED THE EROSION OF THE FLEXIBILITY OF GOVERNMENTS AROUND THE WORLD TO PROMOTE THEIR CULTURAL DIVERSITY AND CHART THEIR CULTURAL FUTURES. WE HAVE LEARNED HOW ECONOMICS CAN BE USED TO PRY OPEN AND DISMANTLE CULTURAL INITIATIVES. CANADIAN ARTISTS ARE NOW AT THE FOREFRONT OF AN INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN TO ADDRESS THE PHENOMENON OF CULTURALLY DISTORTING TRADE LAWS. MAKE NO MISTAKE, TRADE IS GOOD, LIBERALIZATION IS GOOD AND GLOBALIZATION IS DESIRABLE, BUT ONLY SO LONG AS THESE MOVEMENTS RESPECT THE ASPIRATIONS AND CULTURES OF ALL PEOPLES.

ACTRA IS WORKING THROUGH TWO GROUPS: THE COALITION FOR CULTURAL DIVERSITY HERE IN CANADA, AND INTERNATIONALLY WITH THE INTERNATIONAL NETWORK FOR CULTURAL DIVERSITY. LET ME TAKE A FEW MOMENTS TO LET YOU KNOW WHAT WE ARE DOING.

TOGETHER WE ARE WORKING WITH CANADIAN GOVERNMENT TO ENSURE IT FULFILLS ITS PLEDGE TO REFRAIN FROM MAKING ANY COMMITMENTS IN TRADE TALKS THAT WOULD RESTRICT OUR ABILITY TO SUPPORT OUR CULTURE, UNTIL THERE IS A NEW INTERNATIONAL INSTRUMENT FOR CULTURAL DIVERSITY. THE INCD, WORKING IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE

MINISTERIAL NETWORK ORGANIZED BY MINISTER COPPS HAS RELEASED A DRAFT OF A POSSIBLE CONVENTION ON CULTURAL DIVERSITY, AND WILL MEET THIS COMING OCTOBER IN SOUTH AFRICA.

THOR BISHOPRIC:

CANADIAN ARTISTS LIKE ROBERT ARE INDEED IN THE FOREFRONT OF THE GLOBAL CULTURAL DIVERSITY MOVEMENT AND WE ARE PROUD OF THIS. BUT, THIS IS ONLY PART OF THE SOLUTION TO THE CHALLENGES I OUTLINED EARLIER. CANADIAN ARTISTS ARE ALSO WORKING ON A BOLD NEW VISION FOR CANADIAN CULTURE THAT WILL BE UNVEILED SOON. SOME OF THE COMPONENTS OF THIS VISION ARE IN THE WRITTEN BRIEF ACTRA SENT TO YOU AND WE HOPE YOU WILL HAVE A CHANCE TO REVIEW IT.

AMONG ITS KEY POINTS ARE –

- A REVITALIZED AND RESTRUCTURED PUBLIC SERVICE BROADCASTER
- A REVITALIZED INDEPENDENT PRODUCTION SECTOR, WITH PUBLIC SUPPORT GOING TO THOSE WHO WILL WORK WITH CANADIAN CREATORS AND ARTISTS AND WILL HAVE THEIR OWN MONEY AT RISK, NOT THOSE WHO MERELY LINE THEIR OWN POCKETS
- CENTRAL TO OUR VIEW IS THE ABSOLUTE NECESSITY TO CONTINUE TO REGULATE CANADA’S BROADCASTING SYSTEM, TO APPLY MEANINGFUL QUOTAS AND TO ENSURE THAT THOSE WHO USE THE PUBLIC AIRWAVES FOR PROFIT PAY HANDSOMELY FOR THAT PRIVILEGE.

ACTRA HAS TABLED SOME IDEAS ABOUT HOW WE CAN CREATE AN ENVIRONMENT IN WHICH ARTISTS CAN PRODUCE THE POPULAR PROGRAMS THAT WILL ATTRACT CANADIANS. BUT, WE HAVE MUCH WORK TO DO ON OUR NEW VISION FOR CANADIAN CULTURE. THE PROBLEMS ARE PROFOUND, THE CRISIS IS SERIOUS AND A BROAD RANGE OF ISSUES MUST BE CONSIDERED.

WITH GLOBALIZATION, CONVERGENCE AND THE CONTINUING VERTICAL INTEGRATION OF THE WORLD'S FILM, TELEVISION, DIGITAL MEDIA, BROADCASTING AND TELECOMMUNICATIONS INDUSTRIES, SOME ARGUE IT IS NOW IMPOSSIBLE TO TELL CANADIAN STORIES SUCCESSFULLY. WE DISAGREE. CANADIAN PERFORMERS WILL NOT STAND BACK AND ALLOW A GLOBAL MONOCULTURE TO SWEEP OVER US.

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