Rowland, Wade. “CBC brought to you by . . . ; CRTC decision to allow advertising on Radio 2 does nothing to solve funding woes”. **The Toronto Star**, 05-30-2013.  
  
In a decision that commission vice-chair Tom Pentefountas calls "crazy," the CRTC has decided by majority vote to allow the **CBC** to introduce advertising on its Radio 2 and Espace Musique radio networks.   
While the **CBC** had asked for permission to eventually carry nine minutes of advertising per hour, the CRTC decision limits the network to four minutes per hour, in no more than two separate breaks.   
The change is to be reviewed in three years, at which time the **CBC** can apply for renewed permission.

In a strongly worded dissent, Pentefountas pointed out that the $10 million to $11 million annual revenue expected to be earned amounted to only about 0.6 per cent of the **CBC**'s overall budget.   
  
"I find it unfathomable that we're upsetting the balance of the Canadian radio broadcasting ecosystem for $10 million in revenues in the case of Radio 2 and a few million dollars in the case of Espace Musique. ... This crazy pursuit - and I emphasize the term - will destroy the very exemplary trademark character that these services enjoy among Canadians."

Pentefountas wrote: "The licensee will become more and more dependent on audience ratings, which will influence the sound and feel of its programming. Listeners will ... tune in less and less or will stop listening altogether."   
One can only add bravo for a sane and courageous voice.   
  
Some of the intervenors in the licensing process, myself among them, had hoped the commission would at least give a nod to the eventual need for **CBC** to get out of commercial sponsorship altogether in order to justify its continued existence as a taxpayer- supported service.   
  
This decision is a step in exactly the wrong direction in that it essentially eliminates **CBC** radio's distinctiveness and therefore its relevance. With no further claim to relevance it has no legitimate claim to federal subsidy. **CBC** television is already in this tenuous position, and now radio joins it.   
  
As Pentefountas says, there can be little doubt that at the end of the three-year trial, the **CBC** will be back asking to expand advertising to Radio One as well, where the big audiences are and where revenue would be far more substantial.   
  
Programming will inevitably change to suit advertisers' needs and demands, just as it has on **CBC** television, where product placement has become routine and while dramas like Little Mosque on the Prairie and Arctic Air are shaped to include product references.   
  
According to its renewal application, the **CBC** intends for Radio 2 and Espace Musique to be supported almost entirely by advertising revenue rather than by government **funding**.   
  
Reliance on commercial sponsorship condemns any mass medium to eventual conformity to commercial rather than civic standards of value and quality. This principle has been understood since the beginnings of broadcast radio services in the 1920s.   
  
Commercial broadcasters evaluate quality not according to the inherent value of their programs, but according to how well those programs serve the interests of advertisers. In other words, commercial broadcasters are, by definition, in the service of advertisers and not the public.   
  
That is the essential and irreconcilable difference between commercial and public service broadcasters. One serves advertisers by assembling high-quality audiences - large numbers of viewers or listeners with the right demographic profiles. The other serves the public by providing the highest available quality in informative and entertaining programs.   
  
Whether the **CBC** will be preserved as a public broadcaster in the authentic sense of that term, free of advertising and commercial obligations, is a question that can now only be answered by Parliament. There is reason to hope that the CRTC decision might prompt legislative action in the right direction.   
  
Pentefountas quotes Prime Minister Stephen Harper, in a 2004 speech:   
  
"With more specific reference to English-language **CBC**, its radio services have remained non-commercial, giving its audiences a programming with which they are generally satisfied and which is seen as unique. However ... we believe that **CBC** English-language television should become, and will have to become, more distinctive. ... We should consider giving it a **mandate** that clearly articulates its role as a unique Canadian broadcaster. ... We would seek to reduce **CBC**'s dependence on advertising revenue and its competition with the private sector for these valuable dollars."   
  
Now may be the time to urge all federal parties to begin seriously looking at ways to **fund** the **CBC**, without advertising, at a level that will allow it to achieve the excellence of which it is capable and which Canadians deserve.   
  
Wade Rowland is author of the newly released Saving the **CBC**: Balancing Profit and Public Service   
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