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Doyle: Dismantling or diminishing CBC is the most elitist position of all

By JOHN DOYLE

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*The idea that CBC television and radio is a frivolity is the position of a small number of well-off cranks*

Me, I'm not sure that Kellie Leitch and her campaign are real. I think it's all part of this fake-news thing that's going around.

Listen, the candidate and the candidate's positions don't sound authentic. It smells bogus. I mean, seriously – a well-off surgeon, academic, former cabinet minister and MBA is traipsing around drumming up support and media attention by attacking "the elites" in Canada. Aren't such people struck down by a bolt of lightning for brazen hypocrisy?

Sadly, to paraphrase Leitch's own assessment of Justin the Good's remarks about Fidel Castro, it is not a fake or parody campaign. But it is certainly shameful and an embarrassment.

Leitch has taken a position4 on the CBC. It must go. That's it; just dismantle it and move on. This proposal was a welcome break from Leitch's ongoing obsession with screening immigrants for anti-Canadian values. The sort of horse manure that got many Conservative cabinet ministers exactly where they are today.

On the matter of the CBC, Leitch was, apparently, trying to trump – pun intended – Maxime Bernier who wants to make the CBC advertising-free and shift it to a funding model5 similar to that of PBS and NPR in the United States. That is, the begging bowls come out about six times a year. You send 'em your money and get a tote bag.

Well, I've stopped chain-sipping lattes long enough to give the two proposals consideration. They are, like the screening-immigrants thing, horse manure. They are quintessentially elite positions about a national broadcaster.

The idea that CBC television and radio is a frivolity, sucking up vast amounts of money to make bad TV and irrelevant radio, is the position of a small number of well-off cranks in Toronto and Montreal, aided by a number of other cranks who, one imagines, stave off personal wretchedness by ceaselessly pointing out that the CBC gets funding to make TV and radio, while they don't.

The CBC administration itself is not immune to the need to evolve. Right now it is proposing the idea that the public broadcaster move to an ad-free model, and requesting additional money that would be replacement financing if it eliminates advertising. It's a tricky route but in TV and online it would change CBC's status as an odd hybrid of both public and commercial broadcaster.

Also, in this matter, I respectfully disagree with colleague Konrad Yakabuski, who asserted6 the other day that CBC "outlived its original purpose," and makes a lot of "forgettable" and unwatched, irrelevant programs. He sides with Maxime Bernier in wanting a PBS-style CBC.

I demur. The idea of a CBC programmed for politicians, policy wonks and newspaper columnists is harebrained elitism of the worst sort. The CBC belongs to the public, not a tiny cabal who think TV is beneath attention unless it's airing a public-policy documentary they agree with. If they'd all paid attention to the reality-TV dynamic used by Donald Trump to win an election, they might not have woken up one recent morning in puzzlement about how and why Trump was the president-elect.

Leitch and Bernier are clueless. Television is the most important, influential storytelling medium of our time. Understanding it and why it has impact is rather necessary information to have, prior to denouncing any area of it. In the specific matter of CBC TV, to cite one example, *Kim's Convenience* is not forgettable, irrelevant, or badly made; nor is it, in Bernier's phrase, an example of "bad Canadian copies of popular American shows."

Outside of Toronto, Ottawa and Montreal, the CBC is a vital presence, providing local coverage and Canadian content, which, though diminished, is vastly appreciated by residents of cities big and small and in rural areas. Dismantle it or reduce it to the begging-bowl status of PBS and all of that is gone. The appreciation of CBC outside major urban areas is precisely why the Harper government never dared to destroy the CBC outright.

You have to live in the bubble of the well-off establishment to be blind to the CBC's importance. At the same time, it is always easy to be critical of the public broadcaster. Parts of it are badly run. There are enormous egos at the top on the TV side and some CBC bosses have a tolerance for mediocrity that beggars description. The same can be said of the federal government and most large corporations anywhere.

Clearly then, Kellie Leitch is real and not part of some fake-news phenomenon. Although I'm sure you'll grasp my initial suspicions. Anytime one witnesses the witless posturing of people who attack the so-called elites, while simultaneously pledging to dismantle or diminish what gives succour to the ordinary among us, one should be very suspicious.