

This movement has had far-reaching effects and is not often given its due. It informed an enlightened consumer approach to medicine that went beyond women's health care. It helped legitimize a number of non-physician sanctioned health alternatives, and influenced a demystification of doctors' power and previously unchallenged power base. Over the years it has forced dramatic changes within and outside the medical establishment, not the least of which is that patient-consumers tend now to be more critical and skeptical in their approach to medical practitioners.

This reclamation of knowledge and struggle for control should be a model for the gay community's relationship to medicine. In the midst of a health crisis like AIDS, when anti-sexuality and anti-gay attitudes are propagated so easily, gays cannot afford to defer so uncritically to a professional body whose best interests are not always with whom they treat.

Of added interest is that these issues of autonomy and control may have ramifications beyond the socio-political arena of AIDS. Slowly, western science is recognizing that determinants of illness entail social and psychological factors as well as biology. Psychosomatic research into the connection between stress and illness shows that certain psycho-social variables are associated with diminished resistance to disease. Specifically, the experiences of "loss of control" and "helplessness", as best as those can be measured, seem to impair the part of the immune system responsible for defending against viral illnesses and cancer (and the part that the AIDS agent undermines). It is too soon for anything conclusive to be drawn, but it appears that autonomy and striving for control, as well as focused anger, are important in maintaining health and in fighting disease. That these are also appropriate responses to oppression show how the personal and political can be linked.

In this frightening time for the gay community, when beleaguered by both AIDS and its political uses, it seems prudent not to submit uncritically to the medical and scientific establishment. As AIDS is being defended against it is best to keep a healthy sense of skepticism, and retain a measure of control regarding all agencies of the state — especially towards medicine which professes to help and heal, but whose agenda has always been broader.

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erceptive readers of *border/lines* may have noticed an apparent discrepancy in our report on the crisis in Canadian broadcasting policy, published in issue no.3. In that article, it was stated that the federal government's scenario for broadcasting policy review was seriously compromised by the nature of the vehicle it had chosen for beginning the review process: a ministerial task force, which would reflect on the problem and consult the milieu, but without necessarily providing a mechanism for public input.

Of course, by the time *border/lines* hit the stands, the Caplan-Sauvageau task force was into the final stages of a coast-to-coast tour, highlighted by a series of public meetings at which interested parties presented their views on the problems of the Canadian broadcasting system.

In fact, as we had stated, public hearings had been explicitly excluded from the task force's *modus operandi*, in the interest of expediency, by communications minister Marcel Masse. Somewhere early on in the task force's work, however, some sage in its entourage must have pointed out the all-too-evident anomaly of such an approach, for in mid-summer the task force abruptly announced that it would be touring the country and meeting, in public, with interested petitioners. I heard of this development on the CBC's "World at Six" one August evening while cruising on a houseboat on the Lake of the Woods, and I imagine it was close to Labour Day before most public interest groups and concerned individuals were in a position to respond.

As it turns out, the task force's consultations were not formal public "hearings" in the sense usually meant by a parliamentary committee or royal commission. What the task force was in fact doing as it traveled around the country was meeting *in private* with selected groups during the day, and then holding a public meeting in the evening at which other, or if they so wished, the same groups, could summarize their positions. The result was undoubtedly fruitful for the enlightenment of the task force, but not necessarily beneficial for the level of public debate, as groups with private interests to promote could do so in private, while groups speaking in the name of some aspect of the public interest played their cards in public. A further quirk was the fact that the private meetings were scheduled to last for three-quarters of an hour each, while at the public meetings speakers were restricted, at least in principle, to five minutes.

But let's not quibble. The task force has a monumental job to do, and I'm perfectly prepared to give it the benefit of the doubt...for now.

The single most important service the task force could perform would be to reaffirm the essential first principle of Canadian broadcasting, to wit, that it is above all else a public service, to be operated in the public interest. Everything else — ownership, structures, regulation, even content — must flow from this source.

In order to make such a reaffirmation, and support it with concrete proposals, the task force will need to overcome a variety of pressures, beginning with its own mandate from the Minister of Communications (which, incredibly, fails to mention in the first instance the public interest or public service as a criterion for guiding policy development), and extending to the very private and often arcane pressures from the "industrial" sector. It will also need to overcome the unfortunate myth that public service can only be thought of in terms of a mammoth, centralized, bureaucratic institution several reference points removed from the public it is intended to serve.

If the task force can find its way clear to surmounting these obstacles and bring down a report with proposals which reinsert the public into the system, it will have performed a major, lasting service to the multitude of communities that make up this thing we call Canada. But if it fails, it could very well go down in history as the gravedigger of the Canadian broadcasting system.

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BROADCASTING WATCH

By
Marc Raboy

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EXCURSIONS