

NEWS RELEASE: January 20, 2006

WHERE THE POLITICAL PARTIES STAND ON CULTURE

Canada's Political Parties State Their Positions on Cultural and Communication Policy

"Troubled by both the lack of media coverage and political party attention to cultural and communication policies" in this election, Dr. Paul D. Boin decided to ask Canada's main political parties directly. Boin, an assistant professor of Communication Studies at the University of Windsor who also teaches a course on Canadian cultural and communication policy, formulated five specific questions that were sent out to the Liberal, Conservative, New Democratic, Bloc Quebecois, and Green parties. [Note: BELOW (and at: www.RNNnews.info) you will find the complete OFFICIAL PARTY RESPONSES to Boin's five cultural policy questions.]

Over the past five years "there have been four different governmental reviews on the state of our media landscape with the goal of informing our leaders' policy decisions as to how Canadians will communicate, be informed, and entertained in the 21st Century." Boin says that these four reviews - the Heritage Committee review (*Our Cultural Sovereignty: Canada's Second Century of Broadcasting*), the Industry Canada review (*Opening Canadian Communications to the World*), the Senate Review (*Interim Report on the Canadian News Media*), and Prime Minister Martin's ad hoc cabinet level review (Industry Minister David Emerson's 3-person review committee) - not only "have conflicting and competing recommendations but, depending on which recommendations are ultimately accepted and rejected, could have a dramatic impact on the state of our democratic and cultural life."

Boin feels that issues such as CBC funding, foreign ownership limits, Canadian content regulations and support for the arts "should be a front page election story". He states that, "While Canada's mainstream media seem to devote ample coverage to issues such as health care, the military, taxation, and crime, they tend to either ignore issues of cultural and communication policy or relegate it to the business and entertainment sections of their newspapers and newscasts."

Boin calls this media problem a "cultural blackout of incredible democratic significance." He says that the usual media claim is that cultural issues are not recognized as being of comparable importance to other issues for the electorate is unfounded. "What comes first? The chicken or the egg?" asks Boin. "Since Canadians rely on the media for their election information, if media aren't covering culture and communication issues these issues become out of sight and out of mind." Boin states that this is especially important because "policy decisions in the cultural realm, will ultimately impact on our media's ability to cover and inform citizens with regards other important issues, be they related to health care, the economy, the environment, or to matters of war and peace."

Boin also says that the mainstream often have "vested interests in various Canadian cultural and communication policy decisions which contributes to the cultural blackout, since such decisions can have a direct impact on their bottom line," and that this "media blind spot can be seen in both the private and public mainstream media."

Professor Boin's hope is that asking the political parties these cultural and communication questions directly will work to "shed light on this neglected policy area so that Canadian voters can make a more informed election choice on an issue the merits much greater public attention."

Below (and at: Web: www.RNNnews.info) you will find professor Boin's five questions and the complete responses of Canada's national political parties.

[Note: These views (stated above) are the those of Dr. Paul D. Boin, and not necessarily the views of either the Department of Communication Studies or the University of Windsor.]

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Questions posed (January 12/05) and answers compiled (January 19/05) by Dr. Paul D. Boin, Assistant Professor of Communication Studies, University of Windsor, 519-253-3000 ext. 2893, pboin@uwindsor.ca)

The following responses are the **OFFICIAL POLITICAL PARTY RESPONSES** (in their entirety) of Canada's main political parties (Conservative Party, Liberal Party, New Democratic Party, Green Party, and the Bloc Quebecois) **to the following five cultural and communication policy questions:**

- 1. What is your party's position in regards to funding levels at the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation? If elected would your party increase, maintain, or decrease CBC funding levels in the coming years.**

<u>Party</u>	<u>Response to Question #1</u>
Conservative	"The Conservative government will ensure that the CBC and Radio-Canada continue to perform their vital role as national public service broadcasters."
Liberal	"The Liberal Government worked with the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) to ensure it can fulfil its programming mandate while addressing the needs of Canada's regions. In Budget 2005, the Liberal Government confirmed the importance of public broadcasting by providing an additional \$60 million in 2005-2006. This was in addition to the nearly \$1 billion already committed in the 2005-2006 Main Estimates. As well, the CBC has been exempted from any cuts to its budget under the Government-Wide Expenditure Review. A new Liberal Government will support the CBC to ensure it can meet the needs of Canadians at a grassroots level."
New Democratic	"New Democrats have always been strong supporters of the CBC and public broadcasting, of film and television, of the arts, and above all, of artists. Our investment plan is about focused, targeted steps to support creative people and to make sure Canadians see themselves in our culture. The NDP has fought hard for increased and stabilized funding for the CBC to off-set the years of Liberal cuts to CBC's budget and lack of commitment from Paul Martin's government to protect and promote public broadcasting."
Green	"The Green Party of Canada proposes to Provide stable base-funding for the CBC to provide quality television and radio programming in both official languages."
Bloc Quebecois	"Le Bloc Québécois est en faveur d'une télévision publique forte avec un financement adéquat. De plus, nous croyons que celle-ci devrait être représentative de toutes les régions et que cette condition devrait être intégrée dans leur condition de licence. Le Bloc Québécois croit donc au maintien du financement avec une indexation minimale et la préservation des émissions d'affaires publiques et d'information ainsi qu'une augmentation du nombre d'heures consacrées aux dramatiques."

- 2. What is your party's position in regards to the funding levels of other Canadian cultural organizations and programs such as: the Canada Council for the Arts, Telefilm Canada, and the National Film Board of Canada? If elected would your party increase, maintain, or decrease the funding levels to these organizations and programs in the coming years?**

<u>Party</u>	<u>Response to Question #2</u>
Conservative	"A Conservative government will preserve the role of the National Film Board, the

	Canada Council for the Arts, and other federal arts and culture agencies."
Liberal	<p>"In 2001 the Liberal Party launched the largest investment in Canadian culture: <i>Tomorrow Starts Today</i>. This \$560 million initiative focused on long-term sustainability and was extended in 2004-05 and 2005-06, providing an additional \$207 million and \$192 million.</p> <p>The Liberal government will provide predictable funding levels for the arts; Budget 2005 further extends \$172 million of new funding annually for four years. This brings total new funding for <i>Tomorrow Starts Today</i> to \$860 million over the next five years.</p> <p>A Liberal government will also:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure funding for key cultural institutions such as Telefilm and the CBC; and, • Provide increased support for Canada's major arts organizations."
New Democratic	"Canada's NDP will provide increased funding for the Canada Council for the support of artists and ensure that the government follows through on November's Canada Council funding announcement. Our platform includes funding of \$600 million over four years in support of artists and the arts. The NDP plan gets results for arts and artists by: Introducing fair tax treatment for artists through tax averaging and exemption of the first \$30,000 copyright and certain royalty income; Providing increased funding for the Canada Council for the support of artists; Directing the CRTC to require clear, binding, monitored and enforced performance standards for broadcasters, including a significant increase in the production and broadcast of Canadian drama; Ensuring that Canadian television networks remain Canadian owned; Providing sustained funding for the Canadian Television Fund and Telefilm Canada; and Enhancing federal film incentives to encourage film and television production and working with film distributors on a strategy to increase distribution of Canadian films."
Green	<p>"At every level, arts and culture help define our identities and communities, they unlock our individual and collective creativity, and help Canadians share their ideas worldwide. The Green Party understands that our future together, our sense of who we are, depends on policies that ensure a thriving, diverse and socially responsible cultural community as part of an inclusive Canada.</p> <p>The Green Party of Canada proposes a 40% increase in funding for Canadian film production, to be distributed between Téléfilm Canada, the National Film Board of Canada and other independent film initiatives. This new portion of their budget would ideally be allotted to regional production and "non-traditional" production (sci-fi, animation, etc.). We also work to see funding for the Canadian Council of Arts doubled to surpass \$300 million (\$10 per Canadian), and to substantially increase funding to the Cultural Human Resources Council."</p>
Bloc Quebecois	<p>"Le Bloc Québécois a demandé au cours des deux dernières années l'augmentation à 300 millions \$ du budget du Conseil des arts du Canada. En outre, le Bloc demande l'indexation du fonds du long métrage ainsi que la création d'un fonds du long métrage documentaire.</p> <p>Le Bloc Québécois considère essentielle la hausse du financement de la Commission de droit de prêt public pour les écrivains et le maintien du programme d'aide aux publications."</p>

3. What is your party's position in regards to foreign ownership of our telecommunications and media companies? If elected would your party maintain the existing foreign media ownership limits for telecommunication and broadcasting companies? Will your party allow foreign interests to own over 49% of our telecommunication and broadcasting companies?

Party	Response to Question #3
Conservative	"While recognizing Canada's diverse culture and shared history, we will work to strengthen opportunities and accessibility in both the domestic and international markets for our creative works. The Conservative Party of Canada believes that

	Canadian artists can compete with the best in the world. Any change to foreign content rules for telecommunications and broadcast distribution, will not take place without full consultation and discussion with industry and the people of Canada."
Liberal	"Canada has a duty to protect its cultural identity. This Liberal Government firmly holds that Canadian programming interests will not be sold to foreign interests. In response to conflicting reports from two House of Commons committees, the Liberal Government firmly reiterated that it has no intention to modify foreign limits on broadcasting or general content. Foreign investors are limited to owning up to 40 percent of shares in Canadian media. The Liberal government strongly supports these restrictions on foreign ownership and has no plans to alter them. The strength of Canada's broadcasting system must not be compromised by any kind of foreign-ownership measures."
New Democratic	"It is essential that we keep Canadian control of one of our most important cultural industries and through it foster the development of Canadian identities that are distinctly recognizable to ourselves and to others. We will oppose any attempt by other parties to ease foreign ownership restrictions. New Democrats want to maintain current restrictions to foreign ownership in this sector. We want a Canada written about by Canadians, portrayed in productions by Canadians, encouraging Canadian artists, presenting Canadian news – made possible by a vast array of Canadian workers and technicians."
Green	"The Green Party is committed to protecting the sovereignty of Canadian telecommunications companies in order to ensure that foreign interests cannot seize control of our media."
Bloc Québécois	"La levée des restrictions sur la propriété étrangère dans le domaine des télécommunications et de radiodiffusion représente une véritable menace pour la culture québécoise. En effet, devant les mutations technologiques qui caractérisent les activités dans ces domaines, les entreprises de télécommunication sont devenues des entreprises de distribution de contenu. Penser que l'augmentation de la part du capital étranger dans les entreprises de télécommunication à plus de 46,7 % n'aura pas d'impact sur le contenu de nos médias est illusoire. Bref, Le Bloc Québécois s'oppose fortement à la levée des restrictions sur la propriété étrangère dans le domaine des télécommunications."

4. What is your party's position with regards to existing Canadian broadcasting content regulations, and towards the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC)? If elected would your party maintain, increase, or decrease existing Canadian content quotas on our television and radio broadcasting companies? Would your party maintain or change the role of the CRTC in the coming years? If so, how?

Party	Response to Question #4
Conservative	"The Conservative Party believes in a stable Canadian presence in a varied and vibrant broadcasting system. The Canadian broadcasting system should offer a wide range of Canadian and international programming, while being respectful of Canadian content. The system should provide audiences with maximum choice and have the ability to utilize new technologies to achieve its public and private objectives. A Conservative government will review the role of the CRTC in concert with its review of the Broadcasting and Telecommunications Acts to ensure that it plays a relevant role in Canadian broadcasting."
Liberal	"The Liberal Government has a strategy that emphasizes high-quality Canadian content reaching Francophone or Anglophone markets showcasing Canadian drama, children's programming, cultural programming, and documentaries. The Liberal Government remains confident the role of the CRTC. However, in an era of constant change the CRTC should systematically review its regulatory policies and regulations to determine if they are achieving their stated objectives. Therefore, the Liberal Government will ask the CRTC to prepare annual reports

	outlining steps to streamline rules, regulations and decision-making processes. Furthermore, the Liberal Government will explore whether monetary penalties should be added to the CRTC's toolkit for ensuring compliance with broadcasting regulations."
New Democratic	"Canadian content requirements for all broadcasters were originally introduced as an effort to develop Canadian TV production capacity, and to address the overwhelming dominance of U.S. programming during prime time. The changes in 1999, that redefined the content requirements for prime time, created an influx of U.S. content, and caused a serious decline in Canadian English language television drama production. The NDP thinks a review of these changes is long overdue. The CRTC should be directed to review the 1999 television policy for the exhibition of priority programming in prime time and set firm content and spending requirements for broadcasters. The NDP plan includes a significant increase in the production and broadcast of Canadian drama and would also ensure that Canadian television networks remain Canadian owned."
Green	"The Green Party recognizes that here in Canada we have among us some of the best film, radio and television professionals in the world. We believe that we must strengthen our efforts so that these people don't become mere sub-contractors to foreign projects. We would work to implement a Canadian content law stipulating that broadcasting firms must show 50% Canadian content during prime time television viewing hours, in order to favor the integration of Canadian dram series. We would also enforce a law that film and video chains must offer 20% Canadian material."
Bloc Quebecois	"Le Bloc Québécois est en faveur du resserrement des quotas de contenu canadien et francophone afin qu'ils soient respectés partout et dans tous les médias, incluant la radio par satellite ou les stations radiophoniques frontalières. Nous croyons qu'un instrument de réglementation tel que le CRTC est essentiel et nous travaillerons ardemment afin de nous assurer que son rôle soit maintenu et resserré en proposant une révision de la politique canadienne de radiodiffusion."

5. What is your party's position in regards to existing media ownership concentration levels? If elected would your party work to reduce, maintain, or allow for further media ownership concentration? What will your party do in order to ensure that there is a diversity of media ownership in Canada?

Party	Response to Question #5
Conservative	"The Conservative party recognizes the vital role played by the private broadcasters of Canada through their local and regional programming that reflects the language and multicultural realities of our country. Private sector broadcasters and service-providers first and foremost are businesses and must be able to compete in an ever increasing fragmented and global market. We recognize the need for both regulatory flexibility and predictability. Broadcasting policy in Canada must be relevant in today's communications environment and responsive to the demands of Canadians. We will review and update the Broadcasting Act to ensure its relevance in today's technological environment, and we will establish clear, national policy directions and a framework that will maximize the freedom of choice and ensure that freedom of speech is respected."
Liberal	"Competition in all economic sectors, including the media is one of the best ways to promote the Canadian economy. The Competition Bureau assesses all significant mergers to determine their impact on competition, including mergers in the media sector. The Liberal government recently proposed changes to the <i>Competition Act</i> to enhance the Bureau's enforcement powers. These amendments died when the opposition parties defeated the government in November 2005. Also the Senate Standing Committee on Transportation and Communications tabled an Interim Report on the Canadian News Media in fall 2005. They are examining ways to

	ensure that Canadian news media remains independent and diverse."
New Democratic	"We will oppose any attempt by other parties to ease foreign ownership restrictions. New Democrats want to maintain current restrictions to foreign ownership in this sector. We want a Canada written about by Canadians, portrayed in productions by Canadians, encouraging Canadian artists, presenting Canadian news – made possible by a vast array of Canadian workers and technicians."
Green	"The Green Party of Canada would enforce an antitrust law in order to diversify the scope of Canadian media, and to create opportunities for emerging enterprises to flourish."
Bloc Quebecois	"Le Bloc Québécois est en faveur des principes de diversité culturelle et de diversité d'information. Le Bloc Québécois n'entend pas quantifier de limites en ce qui a trait à la concentration des médias mais entend s'assurer que les principes édictés plus haut seront respectés en tenant compte, évidemment, des champs de compétence de Québec. Le Bloc Québécois travaillera en fonction de la diversité de la propriété de la presse plutôt qu'en fonction de la concentration."

Many thanks to all of the above political parties for their prompt response to this questionnaire.

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