



**FUTURE OF  
RADIO-CANADA  
INTERNATIONAL  
STILL UNCERTAIN**

*by Margaret Kopala, President, Ukrainian Professional and Business Association of Ottawa*

The death of Canada's radio link with the world may have been averted. A huge wave of protests from media commentators, organizations representing a wide cross-section of Canadian society, and listeners from all over the world has succeeded in stalling a move planned by the Canadian government to close the service on March 31st, 1996.

Doubt, however, about the future of RCI lingers. Pulling no punches, Canada's pre-eminent political commentator Allan Fotheringham, in his January 9 Financial Post column, stated, "With the death of the shortwave service of Radio-Canada International, this country will descend - in this electronic age - to the level of a Third World country. It will be the only G-7 country without an international service."

RCI, which has 9 transmitters in Sackville, New Brunswick, and relay exchanges with England, Germany, Austria, Portugal, Korea, Japan and China, is the voice of Canada to the world through radio. In addition to the Canadian Forces Network which provides a 24 hour satellite service to Canadian contingents around the world, RCI provides a 24 hour satellite service to East and West Europe. In Ukraine alone, it broadcasts 'live' each evening on the national network whose cable system reaches 12 million homes.

According to the Canadian Exporters Association, it is one of Canada's "more effective mechanisms to tell the world" that we have "competitive products, services, and technology to offer." Similarly, The Business Council on National Issues has stated that RCI "creates and enhances awareness of Canada," thus generating "demand for Canadian goods and services".

But it is the connection with listeners themselves that is most affected, says Roman Pitt, Director of the Ukrainian Section at Radio Canada International in Montreal. "On October 30th," he says, "the day of the Quebec Referendum, RCI broadcast live in Ukraine and the response was massive. All five staff members of the Ukrainian section were kept busy for days dealing with mail received in the letterbox program."

Inaugurated in 1945, when then Prime Minister MacKenzie King broadcast to Canadian troops in Europe, RCI currently has a budget of \$16.5 million, 120 staff and broadcasts in eight languages. According to a study by Radio Australia, this is the lowest

expenditure on a world radio service among the leading industrial nations. The Voice of America budget for 1995-96 is \$359.3 million, the BBC World Service is \$286.1 million while even Australia spends \$27.8 million on its service. As recently as February 7th, 1995, however, the Canadian Government's Response to the Recommendations of the Special Joint Parliamentary Committee Reviewing Canadian Foreign Policy, stated that "by portraying Canada and Canadian values abroad, RCI can play an important role in promoting international peace and understanding."

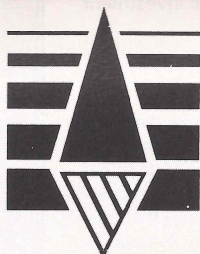
"Indeed," says Roman Pitt, "Ukrainian listeners seem to prefer RCI because the news coverage is more balanced than other services which tend to editorialize; Ukrainian listeners also appreciate the influence that the Ukrainian-Canadian community has on its government and its desire to preserve Ukrainian culture."

The Radio Australia study also estimates that there are more than 600 million shortwave receivers in operation worldwide with 126 international radio broadcasting organizations in operation, of which governments fund 101 and religious organizations the other 25.

Letters protesting RCI closure from the Ukrainian-Canadian community included the Ukrainian Canadian Congress, World Congress of Ukrainians, the Quebec-Ukraine

Business Council and numerous listeners. Dr. Dmytro Cipywnyk, President of the World Congress, in his letter to the Prime Minister stated "The UWC has constituencies on four continents of the globe, and I can assure you that the service has been much appreciated throughout the world. This is especially true of the former Soviet block and Eastern European countries which are developing independent democratic governments."

Among her announcements regarding Canadian broadcasting, Canada's newly appointed Minister for Heritage, the Honourable Sheila Copps, confirmed on January 25th that she is working to restore funding to Radio Canada International. She said that she has started discussions with Canada's new Foreign Affairs Minister, the Honourable Lloyd Axworthy aimed at saving RCI, a service which is funded by the CBC and Foreign Affairs. "We are encouraged on the one level," says Wojtek Gwiazda, spokesperson for the Coalition to Restore Full RCI Funding, "but the problem is the dollar amount. The last time government 'saved' the RCI five years ago, it was by cutting one third of the budget, half the languages transmitted, half the staff and by eliminating three quarters of the programming."



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