

Islands in the Sand Steve Fruitman

This we are faced with in every turn: business controls our lives more than we are either willing to admit or can justify. This is certainly evident in nearly every move that our governments make. It frequently comes at the expense of our traditions and culture which are left exposed to the devices of the grand machines that tap into the pockets and minds of our people. Not only do they conquer the majority of the population by enslaving us to do their bidding for a pittance, reducing humans to disposable status in the process, but to succeed fully they bombard us with pop images, brainwashing and seducing us with spells and quick fixes, which results in our own selling of our birthrights.

I don't think I have to tell anyone reading this article that privately owned radio corporations operating over our publicly owned airwaves are in a continual fight with our elected officials to lower the already low ratios of CanCon required for the granting of their broadcast licenses (to print money). These corporations subscribe to non-Canadian companies to program the music their stations use; what used to be a DJ is now just a fully trained mouth that can be replaced as easily as it was created; their desire to compliment and contribute to the well being of the societies to which they broadcast is virtually nonexistent.

I once attempted to get some East Coast music on the airwaves in Toronto: a place with over 40 radio stations at its disposal. I was told about David Stone, a Cape Bretoner who had taken a radio course in Halifax—passed with flying colours—but couldn't get a job in commercial radio because he sounded too much like a Maritimer. And yet it was because of this fault that I was attracted to him and offered him the position at the University of Toronto's campus/community radio station. The show was a great success.

The abundance of the money-world's cultural product, that generic drug that gets coated in girl-spice or a corporate caricature of the new kid on the block, has kept our home-grown talent from being heard by the multitudes. Why, these drug treatments are so powerful that they can even make us hate who we are! How many people do you know who would cringe at hearing a folk song on the radio, or a fiddle tune, or even Stan Rogers?

"Ya," you can say, "Well, if they'd listen to it, they'd probably like it." But it ain't that simple, folks. It's hard to get most people to a level where they can just ignore this home-

grown 'folk' music. I mean, we can get into great arguments over the semantics of what you've just read here, as academics are clearly prone to do, but the results cannot be argued with: Canadians would just rather listen to what they're force fed because we've been overrun by pre-fab culture.

I'm not knocking pre-fab culture; I just think that something's wrong when it takes control. It's penetrating our last frontiers: outposts, isolated reserves, even those small closed communities like the ones that still use horse and buggy. It is perpetrated by a vast array of devices: billboards, electronic media, banners, sponsorships, scholarships, hockey boards. With it comes a fashion statement, a social statement, a required abandonment of what has gone on before for this impermanent, alien controlled world of pop culture. It turns young against old, east against west, north against south, rich against poor (well, that's a given!), etc. It needs to do this in order to control our minds so completely that we fully buy into whatever it is they're selling. They've got shareholders to answer to. Trouble is most of their shareholders are us. We invest in the mutual funds with our RSP contributions, don't we? And we do want to see that bottom line improve, don't we? "Hey, we made \$500 last year!"

We know that we need to hear our stories on our airwaves, both television and radio. Our stories are our lives, and the lives that made our lives, made our history, made us a nation of people, so that we can reflect on the principles and meanings of these lives; to understand and know what to do next. Sharing our stories, be they musical traditions, tales, folklore, heritage, history, what have you, is what keeps us together, continually learning about one another. Lose this and we drift apart.

Therefore, in future issues of the *Bulletin*, I will explore the issues of how our airwaves are utilized to further the comprehensive understanding of our folk-cultures. I'll look at the Internet, the folk biz, the folk programs, the folk celebs; I'll visit the world of the electronic media, how and where it is used for the peoples' stories; and I'll even give you tips on how to get folk stuff played on the radio. As a result, you'll be able to send in your views and completely overwhelm the editors of this fine newsletter, giving them endless headaches in the process. Why make life easier for them? So feel free to comment and make this an interactive column worthy of 'rhetoric folklorique.' And let's have some fun doing it.