

## “The Valour and the Horror” Should the CHA have intervened?

*In a recent article published in The Beaver, Christopher Moore analyzes the controversy surrounding the film “The Valour and the Horror,” broadcast by the CBC. His concerns focus on the Senate’s meddling and its pretentious claims to be the judge of history. What he finds most unsettling, however, is the passive attitude of historians in a debate that placed intellectual freedom on the line. He criticizes the Canadian Historical Association, among others, for not intervening.*

*With permission from Mr. Moore and Mr. Buckner, CHA President, we have published the following excerpts of their correspondence on this matter. Your comments are eagerly awaited.*

Dear Professor Buckner,

(...) I would not for a moment want the CHA to declare “The Valour and the Horror” a good history or a bad one — the CHA exists to represent historians, not pass judgment on them. But the CHA should promote and defend open-ended discussion of history, and particularly it should defend the principle that historical debate must go on in open, non-coercive forums.

And that is where it has failed. The censorious activity of some historians and the passivity of organizations like the CHA are combining to worsen the reputation of the historical profession in general. I hope that even at this late date, the CHA Council might consider making a declaration in favour of open discussion and against the activities of the Senate Subcommittee.

Christopher Moore

Dear Christopher,

(...) I am far from certain what, if any, the appropriate action of the Canadian Historical Association ought to be. As you point out, it is not the job of the Canadian Historical Association to pass judgment on historians’ work, particularly in a case like this one where the historical specialists appear to be divided over whether the programme in question was or was not a valid interpretation of a particular set of events and action. Moreover, while it is certainly our duty to speak out in favour of open historical debate, it does not seem to me to follow automatically that we should condemn a Senate Subcommittee for attempting to contribute to such a debate nor that we should condemn those historians who chose to appear before that Subcommittee and give their opinions. Indeed, the Senate Subcommittee’s proceedings have led to a more vigorous, public debate that would not otherwise have taken place, as witness the various articles that have appeared in newspapers and journals. I must admit that personally I find the views of many of the Senators objectionable and their method of proceeding appears to have been rather arbitrary but they are entitled to their opinions and I suspect that a less one-sided method of proceeding would have done little to alter them.

Phillip Buckner

Dear Phillip,

You will recall that my original criticism was of the CHA’s passivity in this matter.

If the CHA Council really believes that the Senate Subcommittee’s actions have promoted healthy discussion, perhaps you should consider endorsing the Senators’ position — which is that any historical work that has received public subsidy and which may offend should be subject to questioning and correction by the state.

At least then we would have the CHA’s views on intellectual freedom on the record.

Christopher Moore