The future of public television

The neo-conservative counter-revolution that has swept the technically advanced democracies in the last decade has had some of its most visible effects in the realm of communications. Under the war-cry of (market) freedom, conservatism has begun to overturn the main pillars of the preceding liberalism: deficit spending (in the civil economy but not the military economy); state interventionism (in the civil economy but not the military – hi-tech – economy); and public broadcasting (in the political economy of mass culture).

In the cultural domain, public broadcasting in Western Europe, in Canada, in the U.S. (such as it exists), and in Japan, is now facing the most serious crisis of its approximately 50-year existence.

The rise of public broadcasting in the ’20s and ’30s came as a result of national cultural policies being grafted onto universalizing communications technologies. The growth and future of national public broadcasting was from the beginning tied to, and inseparable from, the cultural policies of the nation-state. Thus any reduction of the role of the particular state would immediately entail an increase in the universalizing tendencies of communications technologies – as the Americans fully understood in adding U.S. cultural product riders to postwar reparations aid.

Graham Spry’s famed slogan of the ’30s (“The state or the United States”) has, in the intervening years, gone global. Today it’s the state or satellitization. Yet long before the current neo-conservative relegation of the state, Canada had already opted for media satellitization (in newspapers and in movies; CBC radio and TV, being publicly owned, managed to lag contentedly behind). It’s not the least of the ironies of the present crisis of public broadcasting that the rest of the developed world is discovering how it feels to be Canadianized, as the following Cinema Canada dossier of voices in broadcasting from around the world attests.

Because Canadians experience the constant hammering of American media as a total environment (which is only another way of saying that all Canadian media are marginal in Canada), they are, as economist Abraham Rotstein once wrote, signally ill-equipped to perceive particularities on any other terms than universal ones. As a result, Canadians are basically comfortable as media satellites of the U.S., and Canadian state policy in culture since the early ’30s has amounted to little more than sporadic rear-guard actions to preserve the semblance of Canadian particularity. Thus, in the current context where the entire developed world outside the United States is discovering some of the more appalling aspects of Canadianization, CBC president Pierre Juneau blithely celebrates 1986 as the Canadian network’s best year ever.

The counterpoint to Juneau is provided by Bernard Ostry, TVOntario’s chairman, who, anchored in a Canadian particularity as one of Canada’s leading provincial broadcasters, has emerged in recent months as perhaps the last official defender of the idea of public broadcasting in this country. The forthcoming Caplan-Sauvageau Task Force Report, when it finally appears, might, however, provide Ostry with some much-needed support.

But one of Canada’s leading broadcasting critics, Hertschel Hardin, author of the path-breaking book A Nation Unaware (1974) and more recently Closed Circuits: The Sellout of Canadian Television (1985), a withering attack on Canada’s deregulatory agency, the Canadian Radio-televis ion and Telecommunications Commission, is skeptical. For Hardin, who brings to the debate a welcome note of western Canadian populism, only a detailed understanding of the real political economy of communications can save Canada’s unique experience with public broadcasting from self-inflicted strangulation.

How that experience was unique and how Canada fumbled its broadcasting sovereignty is recounted by Cinema Canada television columnist Joyce Nelson, author of the forthcoming The Perfect Machine: Essays on Television, Technology and the Patriarchy.

From Great Britain, home of the grand old lady of public broadcasting, the BBC, two articulate spokesmen provide a Thatcherite update on a debate that has raged ever since an earlier Conservative government broke the BBC’s monopoly and introduced private commercial television. David Graham, an independent producer, presents the classic neo-conservative arguments for greater market freedom, while Jeremy Isaacs, chief executive of BBC’s newest TV network, the acclaimed Channel 4, replies from an elegant neo-liberal stance.

From Japan, NHK’s Koji Shima describes some of the pressures impinging upon the future of that nation’s public broadcasting system. Yet

Shima is confident that, because of public support, NHK can weather the current crisis.

Finally, from France, where the recent government decision to privatize TF1, the principal state TV network, has produced a storm of public outrage, comes an anguished warning from the French Directors’ Union as to the long-term effects of “cultural crimes.”

In the current repatterning of world culture, as satellite-powered media-empires battle for position in the race to flood the globe with American-style product and 42nd Street pornography, the debate over the future of national culture is likely to take on an intensity which hasn’t been felt since the ’30s. Then Canada became the first modern nation to experience the full force of another nation’s media blast. In the field of cultural devastation, Canada offers a privileged, if negative, example to the world. But as other nations too now discover the Canadian fate, Canada’s experience becomes a valuable store of knowledge.

Quebec’s film technicians’ union recently hosted a conference of trade unionists and audiovisual workers from 40 nations around the world, members of the International Federation of Audiovisual Workers’ Unions’ (FISTAV) executive committee. Whether from Japan, Finland, Ghana, Greece, Great Britain, France or Canada, the delegates found that they all shared two words, “national culture.” And how to best defend it against Hollywood’s Star Wars emerged as the basis for a common strategy.

The current agonizing over public broadcasting is thus far from over. In fact, this shows every indication of becoming the central debate in popular culture for years to come.

Michael Dorland
Liking the snow, Canada produces a perennial flurry of paper and words that attempt to address the problems of Canadian broadcasting. Not surprisingly, those problems are often embedded in, and masked by, language itself. In the midst of all the verbiage, it is easy to lose sight of the problem that is absolutely central to the Canadian broadcasting morass. The crucial phrase, enshrined in the 1968 Broadcasting Act, is the statement that Canadian broadcasting consists of a "single system." Because the confusion surrounding those two words has so confounded Canadian broadcasting sovereignty, it's worth considering their origins.

In the mid-1920s Canadian broadcasting was chaotic: three or four radio stations in any one city shared time, all using the same frequencies and there was bitter-in-fighting for the few available frequencies the U.S. had left to Canada. Moreover, most Canadian radio stations had only 900 watts of power or less, while many American stations boasted 50,000 watts and were beginning to gain network affiliates in this country. It was in this context that the first Royal Commission on Broadcasting, the Aird Commission, was appointed in 1927. The Aird Commission took a strong pro-Canada stance. When its report was released in 1929, the Commission expressed concern that Canadian private commercial broadcasters were not interested in serving underpopulated sections of the country and were broadcasting mainly American programs. It declared its broadcasting should serve the national interest by reflecting Canadian ideals and culture, by promoting national unity, and by educating in the broadest sense of the word. Finally, the Aird Commission recommended that in order to meet these goals, all broadcasting be nationalized as a publicly owned corporation independent of government.

Despite widespread support for this recommendation, two lobbying against nationalization: the Canadian Association of Broadcasters (CAB) and the Canadian Radio League (CRL). The CAB, a group of private station owners, supported the status quo, and especially their "right" to affiliate with American networks. The CRL, a group of Canadian businessmen, offered its own proposal, which envisaged a network of high-power, publicly owned stations and affiliated privately owned community stations. The latter, as the CAB saw it, were to be subsidized by receiving the public stations' "right of way." The CAB's proposal was rejected. In the midst of these varied proposals and interests, Parliament passed the first Broadcasting Act in May of 1932. It established the publicly owned Canadian Radio Broadcasting Commission (CRBC), which would become the CBC, and gave it two major functions: to regulate all broadcasting in Canada and to itself engage in broadcasting. The CRBC was to be funded entirely by Parliamentary contributions, and it could purchase existing private stations as well as construct new public ones.

Superficially, the broadcasting system established in 1932 seems like the nationwide radial network the Canadian Radio League. In fact, by giving the CBC the powers to both broadcast and regulate all broadcasting in Canada, Parliament made the CBC public broad- controlling frame for the whole system. The CBC, with its public-service goals, was to set the boundaries within which the private-sector broadcasters would operate. The private stations were permitted to exist only as very small, circumscribed adjuncts within the national system, and their purely financial incentives were to be well-bounded and structurally overridden by the powers and goals of the public-sector CBC.

In order to picture the 1932 broadcasting structure created by the Act, think of a big circle (the CBC) containing within its boundaries certain private broadcasters (the private broadcasters). The CBC, as both broadcaster and regulator, would ensure that any broadcasting element contained within its boundaries contributed to the national goals outlined in the Broadcasting Act. By granting the CBC these dual powers, the Act created what was quite clearly a single system for broadcasting in that the structure was non-contradictory to its goals. Both theoretically and practically, this single system contained a structure and goals that explicitly coincided.

In practice, however, Parliament did not recognize what it had created. From its inception, the CRBC was not adequately funded to exercise the structural powers it had been granted. For example, when the CRBC set up its network in June 1933, there were six publicly owned and operated stations, and 32 private stations, in the network. By 1936, when the CRBC became the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, only two publicly owned stations had been added, while the private sector had grown to 75 stations. Had Parliament been serious about the structure of its broadcasting system, it would have ensured that public station expansion at least kept pace with the private sector. And according to the spirit of the Act, funding should have allowed the CBC to gradually buy up private stations as it expanded.

Instead, Parliament did not honour the spirit of the Act or its stated terms. Rather, the private-sector stations were allowed to blossom across the country as the means for distributing the CBC's programming. At the time, this was not deemed problematic. Indeed, this form of distribution was probably seen as the most practical and effective means to achieve the CBC's goals. Moreover, as the regulator of the system, the CBC would see to it that the private stations continued to exist only as circumscribed adjuncts.

Work even in its creation the CBC to regulate and control the national broad­ casting system, Parliament simultaneously refused to grant enough funding for the CBC to actually exercise those powers. It may explain why the CBC itself, almost from its inception, struck a self-destructive note in its relationship with the private-sector stations.

For example, the CBC's nation-wide distribution system consisted of a basic network and a supplementary network. In the 1930s, the basic network was composed of six publicly owned stations and 12 privately owned stations. The supplementary network consisted of 20 private stations. All of these stations received, free of charge, three hours of CBC-produced non-commercial programming each evening. This was clearly a boon to the private stations because, at no cost to themselves, they were assured of filling a substantial portion of their air-time. Although only the stations in the basic network were required to air the programming, most of the supplementary network private broadcasters usually did too. Apparently, the CBC's programming was consistently good and highly popular.

Nevertheless, the CBC decided to pay the 12 private stations in its basic network for broadcasting this free pro­ gramming: an absurd decision in any case. It was especially so in terms of the broadcasting structure. As regulator of a single system designed to meet national goals, the CBC could quite simply have required that all stations in its basic network (and supplementary network as well) broadcast the programming. Instead, by paying the private stations to do so, the CBC implied that it didn't have the power to regulate, and that the only way to control was somehow outside the single system. In retrospect, we can see that this decision was a disastrous one, both politically and psychologically. It also ensured that the CBC, as under-funded, would continue to be further financially bled by this ridiculous payment to the pri­ vate stations.

But despite the erosions of CBC's power, the structure and goals of the single system as constituted were non-contradictory. They did not remain that way for long.

In another Parliamentary committee reiterated that the CBC was empowered, if necessary, to take over private stations to extend national coverage. It also opposed private-sector stations to expand group ownership of private stations. But by the mid-1940s, private broadcasters were calling for "co-equal status with the CBC." They proposed to establish their own networks, compete with the CBC, and have the "right" to become affiliates of American networks. To accomplish this, the CAB began lobbying for a separate regulatory body, independent of the CBC, and with the contracting role of the fundamental change in the broadcasting structure.

The response came from the Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences - the Massey Commission - which was appointed in 1949. The commission defended the single system constituted in 1932, especially its goals and the contracting role. In no uncertain terms, the Commission stated:

"Broadcasting in Canada, in our view, is not a business to be directed and controlled in the public interest by a body responsible to Parliament. Private citizens are permitted to engage their capital and energies in the broadcasting enterprise, in the regulation of this body. That these citizens should enjoy adequate security or compensation for the actual monetization of their assets is apt to make, is apparent. But that they enjoy any vested right to engage in broadcasting as an industry, or that they have any status except as part of the national broadcasting system, is inadmissible...The only status of private broadcasters is as part of the national broadcasting system. They have no civil right to broadcast as an industry or any property rights in broadcasting."

Shortly thereafter, however, the bright prospects for the new medium of television gave fresh impetus to the private stations. But by the mid-1940s, they were assured of filling a substantial portion of their air-time. Although only the stations in the basic network were required to air the programming, most of the supplementary network private broadcasters usually did too. Apparently, the CBC's programming was consistently good and highly popular.

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The tragic flaw, however, is that there is always a significant lag between hardware implementation and indigenous software production. The rush to get the technology in place creates a vacuum: the technology is there, but there is nothing to put on it. This is the situation that the U.S. entertainment industry depends on, with its glut of software, programming, movies that almost immediately flow into any available space. A country has to protect that interval, that lag between hardware and indigenous software, to keep its screens own. Quite literally, a country has to keep the technology (in this case, TV) turned off until its own software production has geared up fully and can fill the available air-time, which also must be managed according to the availability of indigenous product. These factors are crucial during the start-up period for a new technology, but the overriding impulse is to simply get the technology in place as quickly as possible, this is what happened in the early 1950s as the Canadian government rushed to extend television "as widely and quickly as possible to other areas," after putting in place only two public CBC stations. The technology-fetish overshadowed other concerns.

Parliament provided funding for only four more publicly owned TV stations, and the government announced that the private sector could apply for licenses in all other areas of the country. This was essentially a repetition of the radio situation of the mid-1930s. By ignoring its broadcasting history, the country was doomed to repeat it. Was the CBC to control the broadcasting structure as created by the Broadcasting Act of 1932? The government seemed to be saying yes and no. Were the private stations permitted to exist only as circumscribed to the CBC's national TV service? Again, the government was ambiguous.

To make matters worse, it was decided in 1953 that TV and radio broadcasting should be financed by advertising revenues and an excise tax of 15 per cent on receiver sets and parts. Given the national public-service goals for broadcasting and the structure of Canada's single system, this form of financing was the least appropriate that could have been chosen. Moreover, revenues from the excise tax were to quickly dry up once the TV set buying spree was over.

With the government acting in such confusion and ignoring the implications of its own decisions, the CAB lobby began to push more forcefully. Pressures for a separate regulatory body - a change in structure that would benefit the private sector - came to a head with the appointment in 1955 of the Fowler Royal Commission on Broadcasting.

Once again a Royal Commission, reporting in 1957, reiterated the position that all Canadian broadcasters constitute a single system in which "the private broadcasters are a complementary but necessary part and over which the Corporation (CBC) through the Board of Governors has full jurisdiction and control." The Commission concluded that "free enterprise has failed to do as much as it could in original program production and the development of Canadian talent, not because of a lack of freedom, but because of a lack of enterprise."

Nonetheless, the Fowler Commission recommended one important change: the creation of a second public agency responsible to Parliament. This agency would regulate all broadcasting, including the relationship of policy and supervision of the CBC's operations. The recommendation was a significant step toward the creation of a fully separate regulatory body. Under the Diefenbaker government, it became the full structural shift for which the private sector had been pressing.

Early in the 1958 election campaign, private broadcasters found a sympathetic ear in the person of Tory leader John Diefenbaker, who was fully in favour of private-sector gains. In a campaign speech at Kenora, Ontario, Diefenbaker stated (reported by The Globe & Mail, March 19, 1958) that "the time was long overdue to assure private stations competing with the public broadcasting system that they would be judged (for their performance) by an independent body as the need arose. They should not be judged by those who are in competition with them..." The statements reflect a fundamental misunderstanding of the broadcasting structure, and, not surprisingly, under Diefenbaker, the CBC or purchased from independent producers, were at an all-time high. So were the audiences for those programs, with record viewing levels for the delightful entertainment of Anne of Green Gables and impressive audiences for the demanding content of Le Dési mondial. Commercial revenue continued strong, administrative expenses were cut. The CBC's long tradition of service led to its being appointed as host broadcaster for Expo 86 in Vancouver.

But at the CBC also know that the official policy of the government is one of restraint. The Board of the CBC is fully aware of its responsibilities in the present circumstances and together with the management and the staff of the corporation, it has done its best to manage the CBC as well as possible during this difficult period.

The performance of the corporation, in what has been a testing time for everybody, has been recognized by the Nielsen study group which said in its report: "The study team has reviewed the actions taken by CBC's management to cover these various shortfalls and reformulated the general direction taken is appropriate. The funds seem to have been found by cutting or consolidating management and by efficiencies in the programming areas."

The board of the corporation understands that it is the government and Parliament who are responsible for the fiscal policy of the country.

The responsibility of the board and the management of the CBC is to manage a difficult financial situation as well as possible. However, it is also the Board's obligation to advise Parliament and government of the impact of budget levels on the fulfillment of the mandate given to the CBC by Parliament – and therefore on the level of services that the Corporation can provide.

This we have done and must continue to do. If we did not we would be failing in our statutory responsibilities towards you and towards the public, our ultimate shareholders.

I should take this opportunity to say that, during this period, the staff of the CBC has continued to perform remarkably well. There are constant remarks in the press about the morale of the CBC staff. Considering the drastic staff reductions and the uncertainty we are going through, this is hardly surprising. However CBC programs on both radio and television, in English, in French, in 12 foreign languages on shortwave, in Broadcasting Act of 1958 removed regulatory powers from the CBC and granted them to a separate, independent broadcasting regulatory body – the Board of Broadcast Governors (BBG), which later became the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC).


Although nowhere clearly stated, the implication of the new bill in 1958 was that the publicly owned CBC should have considerably reduced stature, and that the private broadcasters should have a status approaching that of the CBC. A new regulatory agency would be set up and, for the purpose of its regulations, the CBC and private stations would be equally subordinate to it... Since the new bill contained more explicit provisions for the authorization and regulation of net-

As Canadian as possible under the circumstances

by Pierre Juneau

The CBC has now reached a point where it is utterly impossible to reduce our budget without reducing program services.

Last year was the CBC's most successful year ever by almost every standard of measurement. The quality and quantity of our Canadian programming, whether produced by the CBC or purchased from independent producers, were at an all-time high. So were the audiences for those programs, with record viewing levels for the delightful entertainment of Anne of Green Gables and impressive audiences for the demanding content of Le Dési mondial. Commercial revenue continued strong, administrative expenses were cut. The CBC's long tradition of service led to its being appointed as host broadcaster for Expo 86 in Vancouver.

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91 native dialects for the North have never been better. The comments we get from everywhere, including the press, support this view. So do our audiences.

I'll give only a few examples: Anne of Green Gables reached an audience of more than five million people in one week, a record for what has been a testing time for everyone involved. The comments we received from the public were overwhelmingly positive. The CBC's French network, RCI, reached an audience of more than four million people a week. In Montreal, a market where there are 10 AM radio stations, the CBC French AM station comes second, according to the most recent radio survey.

As for our regional stations, in the course of an average week, over five million Canadians watch our English and French regional television news programs and more than two million tune in to our English and French early morning radio programming.

I think that our staff in the region and in the network should receive recognition for their dedication to their task and their remarkable achievements in the course of the last year.

I would like to return to the obligations laid down by Parliament and myself to report on the capacity of the corporation to meet the requirements of the Parliamentary mandate and to maintain the expected level of service. Let me say first that the objectives established by
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**PUBLIC BROADCASTING**

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**TVOntario: a counter-strategy**

by Bernard Ostry

I have good news and bad news for you. Since most of us seem to like happy endings, I am going to give you the bad news first. Here, then, is the bad news. Throughout the technically sold off. This is bad news, as I take it, fruition.

Do I have a bias in favor of public broadcasting? You'd better believe I do. When I was younger I spent a number of years with the CBC before moving to the CRTC and later on to the Department of Communications and recently I have returned to broadcasting with responsibility for TVOntario. But this does not mean I have a bias against broadcasting by the private sector, which I believe has an important and protected place in our system. Canadians have always welcomed the private broadcaster; there was not a whimper of complaint when Ottawa killed the CBC monopoly thirty years ago. However, the current North American and European animus against public broadcasting destroys a hard-won balance. And thus it deprives viewers of a choice.

The attack on public broadcasting

Let us take a look at the scene today in broadcasting. And since I have admitted bias, I invite each of you to go to the public library and check the facts for yourselves. Let us begin with the United States, our neighbor, trading partner and chief supplier of television programming: A British commentator has pointed out that anyone who watched TV in the U.S. knew how awful it was not to have a single channel uninterrupted by commercials. The British commentator said it was not a single channel which, until recently, was free of commercials. I shall be discussing PBS in a moment. But first we may well ask whether commercials are really necessary in British television. Is it not true that there's no such thing as a free lunch? Well, if commercials are not a nuisance, we have to wonder how it happens that the cost of doing business as much as possible, rather than reducing services. That is the attitude of the board. It is also what management has tried to achieve and what it has in fact achieved with some success.

The CBC has now reached a point where it is utterly impossible to reduce expenditures to balance our budget without reducing services, including program services. I must concede that it is only understandable that every group, every area of the country, every constituency of the Corporation should say that they should not be affected. This is particularly understandable on the part of those who may be losing their livelihood. There comes a point, however, where if one group is not affected then another group or area has to endure more pain. On the other hand it is entirely unreasonable to suggest that more than $150 million could be found in the course of 18 months, in a corporation of the size of the CBC, only by reducing overhead expenditures.

But, in fact, CBC management ranks cut disproportionately, 50 per cent more deeply, on a per capita basis, than other categories.

In spite of recent reductions, the CBC has made remarkable progress in the employment of women. In the senior management category, the participation has made remarkable progress in the management category, the participation of women to our board. We now have five women and seven men.

To conclude, I would like to assure you that the board and the staff of the CBC remain totally dedicated to the task given to them by Parliament of providing a public broadcasting service to Canadians. They are very conscious of the fact that the CBC must indeed be a public service to the public, not a self-serving institution.

In the course of the year we have been asked by the Minister of Communications to provide our views to the Task Force he created on the future of Canadian broadcasting from now until the year 2000. We have done our best to respond to the request of the Task Force and Parliament did it when the previous broadcasting legislation with only one dissenting voice in 1968. It is also an optimistic view because we are optimistic that the CBC must indeed be a public service to the public, not a self-serving institution. We understand that financial difficulties sometimes present themselves and have to be faced. But our board felt strongly that a plan for the future of Canadian broadcasting should be an imaginative and enthusiastic one. We are encouraged by the fact that most of the reactions to our ideas and proposals were positive.

particularly well received was our view that it is perhaps time for the Canadian voice to be heard by our southern neighbours through television, since for generations we have been so hospitable to voices from the south — as we still are.

The talented Canadians — inside and outside the CBC — who created the radio and television programs that we put on the air this year and in previous years can do much more. Canada's creative forces are more numerous, more talented, more able than ever before to contribute to the strength of this country and to its image abroad.

But the proportion of foreign programming is constantly increasing in our country and the proportion of available Canadian programming is constantly decreasing. We do have an honorable tradition of hospitality on Canadian airwaves towards voices and networks from other countries. If there are any cultural barriers in Canada, they bar Canadians more than they bar Americans. Indeed, we have more American cultural voices in Canadian broadcasting than we have Canadian voices.

In such a context, I suggest, the importance of the role of the CBC is greater and greater. All the facts show that an increased commitment of financial resources to Canadian broadcasting would be a wise move. The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation is the cornerstone of our cultural life.

The point is well taken that the public support and acceptance, Washington proposes to
Television is the new state religion run by a private Ministry of Culture... financed by a hidden form of taxation without representation.

— (George Gerbner)
Regulating the sellout of Canadian TV

by Herschel Hardin

Canadian TV has sold out in that the old ideas of an independent Canadian television culture have been sold down the drain. The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) may be doing that, but some of these old ideas have not been abandoned. Canadians couldn’t do much about it, but they could have made the CBC more accountable for its actions. The CBC has been largely American and that’s really what, in my own activism, I was always concerned with.

It’s ridiculous in this day and age that our national broadcasting organization has only one channel in each language, except for the parliamentary channel. It’s ridiculous that provincial broadcast ing organizations only exist on any scale in three of four provinces, and a lot of it is instructional programming. That’s all right, but the fact is a whole dimension of Canadian television isn’t full-bodied. We don’t have a federated network that has maybe two or three channels and the provincial broadcasting organizations. So relative to what could be, relative to the idea of Canadian broadcasting as something separate, distinctive, reflecting the community and allowing Canadians to express themselves as individuals, artists, or citizens who are involved in citizens’ affairs, that’s all gone down the chutes.

One really can’t look at the Canadian television scene without looking at the historical and political scene for the country as a whole. I think that’s one of the mistakes people make who are concerned with television questions and film industry questions. They look at their industry alone, instead of looking at the whole political economy and the ideological backdrop. The difference between the days of the Aird Commission and our situation now is that Aird occurred at a time when Canada was going through a very independent phase. It wasn’t part of the American Empire yet, and it had more or less weaned itself from the British Empire, although R.B. Bennett and others still had traditional, British Empire conservative ideas. In terms of real power in society, economic power and so on, Canada was between two empires. Also because of the circumstances of the Depression, there was a very progressive mood in Western Canada, and that mood met with a Red Tory mood in Ontario and a traditional mood in Quebec. The notion of Canadians not just needing, but being capable of having a broadcast system truly of their own was very much a whole.

In the postwar period that kind of backstop has been coming apart. I think we’ve arrived now, with the free-trade discussions and the intensification of non-national materialism, at a point where the assumptions, the language and the rhetoric which existed in the ’30s and continued to carry on through the Massey Commission and beyond to the Bell Commission, where the first chairman of the CRTC, and Harry Boyle, the vice-chairman, have really begun to fade. It’s almost a whimper now—so much so that we’re only going to really develop an independent broadcasting system if we look at who controls our economy, what the objectives of the economy are, what the objectives of society are and how more and more, our social objectives and cultural objectives are being amputated by a very crude materialism based on dogmatic notions of trade and production.

Ironically people are now talking about the value of culture who never mentioned the word “culture” before. Even those who dismissed it before, or like Simon Reisman appear to have dismissed it, are being forced to acknowledge that at least there’s a feeling for our cultural objectives and the need to keep an eye on them, or at least to pay lip service to protect them. But I don’t think that that’s going to go very far unless there is a much wider sense of what needs to be protected overall.

The structures of power

What I and others discovered in the 1970s was that other structures—private financing structures—just weren’t appropriate and this conflicted with certain ideological assumptions about the need for a private sector and doing things through the private sector of the economy. We had already had a private sector in television—American broadcasting—which came over into Canada and was part of our own television system. If there was to be any, even remote, balance, then we had to focus on ways and means of increasing public-underwritten channels and that’s still the case today. In fact, the supposed rise of private-sector film activity and production of films for television is really publicly-underwritten except that the final decisions are in the hands of very few companies.

What became clear was that while people like Juneau, Boyle and the Ministers of Communication used the official language and private operators in broadcasting and cable also used the official language, they refused to deal with the real structural change that was needed and how television should be financed. And for obvious reasons—they didn’t feel the ideological freedom to do so. The result was that all the Canadian content debates were phony debates, all these official debates that one heard at CRTC hearings and at conferences were phony. They didn’t deal with what really counted and that’s still something particular today: that there’s still the assumption that things should be done through private-sector devices. One of the great ironies is that the CBC, for all its faults, has more or less tried to do what its mandate called for, yet instead of elaborating a model, both in terms of a more diverse CBC, extra channels and new kinds of publicly-owned television at the provincial level, it’s been frozen. That’s just part of a general ideological curve in the country. So, again, the real possibilities for Canadian television are being shunted aside by a much larger debate.

Understanding the CRTC

The CRTC accommodated itself to those who were represented a certain stability, a certain solidarity, a certain financial permanence because those kinds of organizations seem to be safer to give assistance to. There were exceptions: they gave a license to CITY-TV in Toronto, for example, but ultimately even Moses Znaimer and CITY-TV had to sell out to CHUM, a larger organization. The CRTC didn’t grapple with the real questions. One of the most interesting episodes, and one of the most telling ones, was the case of the cooperative cable movement in Saskatchewan which not only consisted of very well-organized local cooperative organizations, particularly the Saskatoon Cable Cooperative which had the support of most of their community, but also consisted of a very, very practical, stable, well-organized movement, the Credit Union Movement in Saskatchewan, which was underwriting the cooperative plans, plus the Cooperative Guarantee Act of the Saskatchewan government, which gave a government guarantee for the financing and, on top of that, had active political support. Well, you put all those together and still the CRTC and the federal government shot it down, and you see all that togetherness, all that organization, all one’s homework done well-prepared—what the CRTC always said. You had all the support of your community, the proper financial backing—when you see that shot down, you say to yourself: “What’s the use of doing it again.”

A study by Marver Bernstein has studied the evolution of regulatory agencies, and elaborated the life-process of a regulatory agency: its gestation in a period of reform—dissensions and the bureaucracies and the previous arrangement was not doing what it was supposed to do and an outcry on the part of interested citizenry—then into adulthood and maturity and finally into senility. The idea was written in the ’50s about the American scene, yet it was, detail for detail, a description of the CRTC and how, almost from the beginning, to the industry it was supposed to regulate. The frustrating part was that some of us who were fighting specific issues and taking on the CRTC realised this a long time ago. We were fighting the battle and being paid attention. A regulatory agency is created by a sense of reform. After the Board of Broadcast Governors, we were going to have the CRTC. And it was intellectually indefensible and artistic: there was Harry Boyle, Jacques Hebert, and Northrop Frye, distinguished people. This was a different battle, a different war.

The stage after that was really a housekeeping stage, where they put the administrative house in order. There was a tremendous flurry of activity, lots of meetings and lots of ideas. But where real changes are not made, the appearance of energy may give the impression that changes are being made. We had the implementation of 80 per cent Canadian ownership, which wasn’t the CRTC’s doing but was just the administrative carrying-on of an Order in Council. Then the CRTC developed an interest in cable and straightened other things out: took control of cable and dealt with the question of the relay of cable signals by microwave to distant head-ends, a question on which it surrendered.

After that, one enters the mature stage of an agency where the language becomes more complicated, the agency itself realises that issues are far more complicated than it had originally imagined and effectively it begins to exaggerate, distort, and change the legislation. At the same time the people that are being regulated do not aggressively and crudely attack the agency, as they might have done in the early days when there was a lot of insecurity. An interchange of communications takes place between the agency, its administrative staff (which becomes more and more
The idea of Canadian broadcasting as something separate, dynamic, reflecting the community and allowing Canadians to express themselves as individuals, as artists or citizens, just isn't there.

powerful), and the companies that are being regulated. There comes to be an identification of interest.

This was actually apparent from the CRTC's very early days. They took the position that to have Canadian broadcasting, you've got to make sure that Canadian television operators continue cause that would be destroying our own objectives. The trouble with that is that it meant maintaining in place inappropriate kinds of licensees, particularly for English-speaking Canada. But you had another kind of perspective, the one we shared in the Association for Public Broadcasting in B.C., that looked to the history, the economic history of broadcasting in Canada and the structural problems of television production and distribution in Canada vis-a-vis American stuff. That organization focussed on those issues and began to raise them directly with the CRTC, and it was because the responses were so evasive that we began to realise how much of an illusion the idea of a national CRTC was, and how much of an illusion the idea that the CRTC was a defender of Canadian broadcasting (which is in many ways synonymous with traditional public broadcasting objectives). The more we identified and fought on specific issues which challenged the CRTC, the more evasive the stonewalling became and the more evident it became how useless the CRTC was. One of the things that disturbed us most was not CRTC policy decisions on large matters but, more, how on very clear matters of specific public administration it did not deal openly and fairly with the issues in a responsible public administration way. If it disagreed with us on a major structural question like public financing versus private financing, that was one thing. But if a clear issue was put to the commissioners, like the question of media concentration, and they evaded it, then they just were not doing what they should be doing as a public agency. And, of course, the big question was the fact that they did not allow for competitive applications from licensees. Not only would they not do that, they wouldn't even deal with the issue nor give reasons why they were not allowing competitive hearings. So, at that stage, the question of television became secondary. What became primary were questions of public administration, democracy and agency integrity.

What was happening in television was simply an expression of what's happening in the government as a whole. The idea of an intelligent and wise public service grew up with the federal public service in the 1930s and the creation of a Canadian Department of External Affairs. Now it may be a myth that that civil service was noble, bright and innovative and that they took unto themselves the best principles of public administration. Nevertheless it was a myth that I, as a student of political science in the 1950s, grew up with that the Canadian federal civil service at the policy-making level was something to be admired. What happened to the CRTC, I think, is a reflection of what's happening in government as a whole. We can no longer afford to have illusions about how the government administration in the country works.

Local power

In western Canada, and western Canada has many political streams, the nationalist political stream in Saskatchewan and B.C. has been very strong, much more nationalist than in Ontario. One immediately began to think of more decentralized ways of doing things, because there was absolutely no way you were going to get any honest decisions from the central administration. So while still fighting these battles with the CRTC, we took an interest in more decentralized structures - one of them was subscriber ownership of cable. There are at least a few subscriber-owned cable systems in the west of a fair size - Regina, West Alford, the original one at Campbell River on Vancouver Island. And then there's also provincial television. The more diverse structures you have, the freer the system is as a whole. But in the '70s, there was a tremendous paranoia about provincially underwritten television. Here things have changed and that's one of the good things that has been happening. There is the realisation that decentralized activity is a good thing and it isn't a threat to Canadian television. On the contrary, it opens the door to more energy, more diversity and more substance for Canadian television. The problem has been that particularly in...
I’ll kick off on the right foot by quoting Spiro Agnew. Agnew, at a famous speech in Des Moines, Iowa, spoke of a tiny elite of privileged men elected by no one, enjoying a monopoly licensed by government. Agnew got massive support from public correspondents, the letters in his inbox going four to one. And in spite of a survey to the contrary by Columbia Law School, it is pretty obvious that the American public supported him. The fact that they did is rather important and we shouldn’t allow his reputation or the subsequent argument to deflect us from an important truth.

The power exercised by broadcasting in highly centralised systems is an embarrassment. It forces upon those systems degrees of political supervision and the necessity of cultural conformity which are not desirable. It prevents those systems from achieving the freedoms appropriate to communications in an advanced liberal society.

Now it may surprise Canadian audiences that public broadcasting from Britain should say public service broadcasting is not free or that it falls under state supervision. You won’t have heard that very often before because not very many people have been willing to say it.

Our television system is heavily supervised. It is supervised directly from a law that says, for instance, political television must impart due impartiality in matters of public policy. And the supervision of that law is handed over to a public authority — in the case of the independent sector called the Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA), and it is managed inside the house by the BBC. But the two systems are closely similar as any observer knows. Now this law is meaningless in the sense that it may have been drafted at a time when people thought opinion or the handling of opinion could be done in an unbiased or objective way. No intelligent commentator in broadcasting now believes this to be the case.

So what the regulator does in effect is worry about anything that upsets the government or upsets politicians or is closely similar as any observer knows. Now this law is meaningless in the sense that it may have been drafted at a time when people thought opinion or the handling of opinion could be done in an unbiased or objective way. No intelligent commentator in broadcasting now believes this to be the case.

The point is that this supervision effectively controls opinion to a degree associated with and developed within the environs of Westminster. It’s a politician’s privilege. Broadcasting thus becomes one of the salons of the twentieth century. What is important first in the arts of appealing the politician. Now that is something from which we should advance and move on.

One of the second things that bothers me about public service broadcasting is that it effectively turns the articulate, the intelligent and the artistic into pensioners of one system. And public service broadcasting of the BBC imposes a massive cultural conformity on the output of the media in Britain. It has therefore managed to establish a reputation that in some respects the future will decide is out of proportion to its real achievement.

What is the BBC’s real achievement from the perspective of a North American audience? I wonder really whether it adds up to much more than, for instance, the BBC as the main exporter of costume drama to the U.S. or the Continent. The BBC has a reputation that is culturally impeccable but in many respects the culture that it advances is the product of a rearguard because the BBC has its origins deep in a fear of the popular franchise. Its cultural history begins with Matthew Arnold and Walter Bagehot and their anxieties about what democracy would do to the culture of the British nation and its politics. They advanced the theory that if you gave the masses the benefit of the best of human thought, you would actually get over the drastic divide between government by an intelligentsia representing a minority, and government by bodies representing a mass electorate.

This fear and anxiety was still very much there when the BBC was founded, and it is written into its constitution, and it’s stayed there. So today what the BBC represents culturally is the cultural priorities of a middle class, a middle class for whom the prominent qualities of the bourgeoisie of the nineteenth century have been turned into a kind of official art. It hasn’t been nearly so good at developing forms of popular culture or developing itself as a democratic medium. Now one would have thought, and I think it’s a reasonable assumption that, if the major political development of the twentieth century has been the extension of the franchise to the massive population in western democracies, then the main cultural development should be the development of important popular culture exploring the issues that ordinary people are keen on. I don’t think the BBC has done this.

When I was sitting at home on Friday night writing notes for this talk and watching Channel 4, I knew that I was going to keep going on but I knew that I was going to have to stop for Bill Cosby and I knew that I was going to have to stop for Cheers. And I asked myself why is it that those programmes have a kind of resilient joysfulness that you don’t get much of in British television? All I can say is that it reminds me of the time when I went to graduate school in Bloomington, Indiana, and sat across the table in graduate residence center from people whom I could not identify. I just couldn’t tell whether they were the sons and daughters of taxi drivers from New York or bankers from Minnesota. There is a democratic quality and an enjoyment of the egalitarian opportunities of American life that is actually within the American public culture.

Now I would ask you to accept two qualifications — one is that the best culture of all times has only been identified by a minority and has never been enjoyed by a mass population and has always needed subsidy—a theory is absolute rubbish. If you look carefully back, you will find that most of the great works have been enjoyed by the majority of the population and most of them got away without public subsidy. Guiseppe Verdi had as many people at his funeral as Elvis Presley did.

But there are two qualifications: one, not everything that is good is recognised. So your Hawthornts and your Emily Dickions achieve posthumous greatness and thank goodness they went on and did their work without an advertising channel; I think they are points that we should bear in mind as we try and work out where the future might go for Britain. There is a sense that we have reached the moment in Britain where we can actually think radically about broadcasting. This moment may not have been reached at other countries. But it does seem to have been reached where I come from. We are attempting to reach a policy for the future.

Now there is a lot wrong with the American system — it is pretty obvious that the First Amendment rights of freedom of the press are not enforceable in America. What is the case is that the U.S. has managed to create new jobs in a period of recession; it is an illustration of this. But the vast majority of them came from new company formations and they claimed by American broadcasters as a carte blanche. You can’t take risks with the good and the bad on the scale that less regulated system would. Now I think these are important points and I think they are points that we should bear in mind as we try and work out where the future might go for Britain. There is a sense that we have reached the moment in Britain where we can actually think radically about broadcasting. This moment may not have been reached at other countries. But it does seem to have been reached where I come from. We are attempting to reach a policy for the future.

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Now what would you do to implement that policy? How would you implement a policy that actually stimulate competition because competition political choice? By reducing the cost of production and achieving efficiencies at the point of production. Now whenever you say that to the large public sector companies in Britain or to the TV companies, they fall back in dismay and say they will all go bankrupt. There is an argument to be had about the prospect of raising money by advertising channels; I think policy ought to concentrate on that point.

Now what would you do to implement that policy? How would you implement a policy that actually stimulates the maximum diversity of production? Impossible — where we have seen that the BBC has demonstrated that the best way to achieve innovation is to give lots of individuals the chance to experiment with the future.

I think, therefore, our policy should take advantage of that reality, should stimulate competition because competition political choice? By reducing the cost of production and achieving efficiencies at the point of production. Now whenever you say that to the large public sector companies in Britain or to the TV companies, they fall back in dismay and say they will all go bankrupt. There is an argument to be had about the prospect of raising money by advertising channels; I think policy ought to concentrate on that point.

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It is equally a fallacy to pretend that everyone who is in favour of markets is in favour of absolutely free markets; there is no such thing as a free market, every market exists within a situation that is a product of previous political decisions and every market exists within political priorities, attitudes and imperatives defined by the society within which it functions. The market is therefore an environment in which people try and satisfy demand and exchange what they have got to offer with other people.

So what would I do with British television? Here are some suggestions and they're probably quite facile and probably quite naive and I expect they can be taken advantage of. Now that might be appropriate in the making of cars or the making of garden tools; it's not appropriate in the business of television. So you would take fairly tough, fairly stringent measures to stop that happening.

The second thing you would do is probably prevent those people making programs themselves. So you would make sure that programs were supplied to them by others. Another thing you might do is to stop any one program producer taking a disproportionate part of the output.

These are all ideas in keeping with the twin objectives of the maximum choice and the maximum diversity. And as you can see they don't allow the market to operate unfettered because in some areas of innovation it is natural that economies of scale are quickly taken advantage of. Now that might be appropriate in the making of cars or the making of garden tools; it's not appropriate in the business of television. So you would take fairly tough, fairly stringent measures to stop that happening.

We also have to accept that the market is deficient, there's still no way you can exchange your material with somebody else. Going the route of the airwaves has problems and difficulties and it makes product expensive. Because of that and because of government's legitimate concern to have certain kinds of public affairs programs, I'd suggest one subsidized channel paid for by the lease rentals on the mass audience channel. A channel run very much like Channel 4 is at the moment. It's a splendid notion and it serves the purposes of setting the standard if those who make decisions about the system think that it is at all necessary.

If there is room for a fifth channel in Britain, and I think there probably is, I would give that to Thames or City Television because our regional companies really don't do a local job.

Furthermore we wouldn't feel it was possible to go ahead properly in this way unless the roles that apply to the broadcaster are firmly written into legislation. And that means the job of the regulatory authorities is largely removed, because if you are written into legislation, if rules are written into legislation, you know they've got to be legislated. So I would be in favour of a policy approach along those lines and I think that would have the advantage of ending elite regulation. It would democratise the system; it would promote more freedom of speech and I think it could be done now and I think it should be done soon.

(Speech given at the 1985 Banff Television Festival panel, "Public Television Around The World: Facing the Conservative Wave.")

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The Conservative delusion

by Jeremy Isaacs

National culture is a very dirty phrase, with all its resonances of the Nazi period until just a few years ago. It now seems to me to be a more than appropriate and absolutely necessary concern that societies need to express...
We have tried and again – Parliament explicitly enjoined us to do this – to take our programs from a multiplicity of sources, including the excellent work which David and his company does for us. And we try, and I very much agree with a lot of what David said, we try to give voice on Channel 4 not just to professional makers of television programs but to people representing different interests in society, who work outside the conventions of the broadcasting systems. We fund such people who are basically radical dissenters and we encourage them to make their work available to us for use on Channel 4. And it causes an eruption here and there and people ask me all sorts of awkward questions about balance and impartiality, but I believe it to be a vitally important role in a democratic society which recognises the pluralism of opinion within that society.

There is one very important thing I must tell you about Channel 4 which I believe to be the reason why we are able to us for use on Channel 4. And it is that we get the share of audience which encourages those who fund us to get their money back, they ought to get their money back.

What are the conditions for survival of broadcasting institutions in what is very certainly a changing environment to which we must respond if we are to survive? I think that they are three; an institution has to manage itself efficiently, manage its resources efficiently and be seen to be doing so. Such achievements are called increasingly into question and there is a public audit of how our broadcasters manage their affairs.

Secondly, any public broadcasting system that wants to survive has to be able to clearly define its aims, to say what it is doing that other broadcasters cannot or will not do. And thirdly it has – and absolutely has to have – the public support in holding its own, in fighting its own corner. It needs the support of an establishment. This is a matter of quite explicit need and the best way of achieving that is to provide in my judgement a news and current affairs service of some excellence and that isn’t easy, particularly if what the news and current affairs people are trying to do runs totally counter to what any one part of the establishment wants to be said.

But basically good public information services commend themselves to people who matter. Broadcasters need, and indeed it’s part of my notion of the role of public broadcasting, to satisfy particular interest groups. They can hang on to that idea that viewers are individuals with individual tastes and not just a mass audience of millions that are going to be satisfied, want to be satisfied and must be satisfied for some of the time with the sort of entertainment which American popular television and British popular television at its best has been able to provide and continues able to provide. But viewers need also to be recognised as people who are interested in computers, people who are interested in and care about music, people who care about consumer protection, people who care about all sorts of tastes that they share not necessarily with the millions that will get into Nielsen ratings, but with hundreds of thousands of other citizens who are contributing to the cost of this service.

And then, lastly, if such a public broadcasting service wishes to have a large and substantial part to play in broadcasting as the BBC does and still does in the U.K., then it also has to have a mass appeal. If it only satisfies particular interest groups it will be a minority service, because that is all the public will fund it to be.

I believe that public broadcasting services which show they can satisfy those tests, can survive even in this world of proliferation which is now upon us. And I believe that the BBC, and I think that any British government will think several times, out of political necessity, (and I say any British government before it seeks drastically to alter or to diminish a corporation which, whatever its failings, can be seen to be serving the British public as well as the BBC is today. Ninety per cent of British voters, and that is to say 90 per cent of British voters, use the BBC services every single week.

My basic point – and here to my amusement I find myself agreeing to-
would like to take this opportunity to explain a little about some of the basic problems now faced by NHK.

As a general rule, state-run broadcasting organizations exist in socialist countries. At the same time, there are various types of public broadcasting organizations in democratic countries, such as those operated primarily on fees paid by the public, those run by the government and those such as the PBS in the United States, consisting of a number of local stations which conduct public broadcasting in their respective regions.

The nature of NHK differs from these public broadcasting organizations overseas, but I would say the BBC in London is the closest to us in terms of organizational structure.

NHK was established in 1925 as Asia's first broadcasting station. In 1950, after the end of World War II, the Broadcast Law was enacted in Japan. It was founded on three principles: maximum popularization and utilization of broadcasting, establishment of editorial neutrality and contributing to the wholesome development of democracy. Based on these, NHK as it is today, was formally inaugurated as the nation's sole public broadcasting organization.

TV broadcasting started in 1953. At present, NHK operates two TV channels, one general and the other educational, two medium-wave radio channels and one FM channel. Since the 1960's, NHK's suite of channels has expanded across Japan. In addition, we have an overseas shortwave service known as "Radio Japan" which is broadcast worldwide in 21 languages.

We have about 70 stations in all parts of the country, staffed by about 16,000 persons. Our total annual budget reaches about $224 million (U.S.).

Since its establishment, NHK has always attached its greatest importance to maintaining its neutrality and securing the maximum availability and benefits of broadcasting for the public. We have always done our best to remain free from any government intervention or influence of commercialism.

As a news-reporting organization, we maintain complete editorial independence and provide our audience with the most accurate and reliable news services at all times. In fact, our news and commentary programs, broadcast five hours daily, are the most reliable among the Japanese audience. NHK is also internationally known for its high-quality educational and entertainment programs.

I would like to describe our unique financing system, free from government intervention or commercialism, that has made it possible for us to produce these high-quality programs. NHK at present produces 97 per cent of all its radio and TV programs. This means that NHK is among the foremost in the world in terms of self-reliance in program supply.

Thanks to our dependable news coverage and high quality programs, we have been able to enjoy strong public support.

It is NHK's unique license fee collection system that has enabled us to operate this way. Our monthly license fee is about $6.10 (U.S.), which gives us an annual revenue of about 217 million dollars (U.S.). This is equivalent to 97 per cent of NHK's total annual budget.

There have recently been some householders who have failed or refused to pay this fee. Still, we have an extremely high license-fee collection rate of more than 90 per cent. We have no intention of revising the present system. As it is evident in people's attitude toward the license-fee collection system, we note certain changes that are taking place in people's view of NHK.

One reason for this is that with the remarkable development of the nation's economy, commercial broadcasters, who rely heavily on revenue from advertisements, have become able to offer higher quality programs during the past 10 years. The commercial broadcasters each have their own nationwide networks, and they have recently been quite active in competing with NHK in both news coverage and program production.

People's sense of value has become diversified in keeping with the drastic changes in the social changes. Their demands are becoming more and more diversified and complex in this age of rapid technological advancement in the field of television broadcasting.

There is constant demand for satellite-related international news coverage as well as a need for information for Japan's further internationalization. News exchanges among the Asian Broadcasting Union (ABU) members and those with the broadcasters in the United States and Europe have become increasingly active year after year. NHK now annually conducts more than 5,000 satellite relays of international news. Moreover, we plan to conduct our exclusive transponders over the Pacific and Atlantic before the end of the year. Internationalization of TV programs has also steadily progressed, with a sharp increase in demands for high quality programs produced overseas. In particular, the public now want to know more about sports programs. Broadcasts featuring the Olympic Games and other big events seriously affect NHK's financial situation. By the way, I am having a hard time negotiating for the broadcast rights for the Calgary Winter Olympic Games 1988 and Seoul Summer Olympic Games 1988 on behalf of the Japanese broadcasting industry. This took me over two years, precisely seven meetings with Mr. Uheroth, to reduce the fee to $2.5 million.

Under these circumstances, NHK is now obliged to make a thorough review of its policy of sticking to its self-reliance rate of 97 per cent in program supply, and is thinking of reducing its in-house production rate to 60 per cent with the next three years.

It may be helpful to purchase more programs from overseas broadcasting organizations and also increase co-production with foreign broadcasters. But it is essential, above all, that NHK's own financial basis be further expanded and strengthened.

Recent rapid development in the field of media-electronics has ushered in the "age of new communications media". It is in fact a "technological revolution". In Japan, too, following the United States, CATV, video discs and videocassettes have become increasingly popular as new types of media. NHK has already clarified its intention to actively participate in the present "information revolution".

But here again, financial difficulties are posing a major obstacle. Satellite TV broadcasters, which NHK has understood that they are able to offer higher quality programs, have become increasingly active year after year. Nevertheless, the broadcast satellite BS-2a launched in 1984 has developed its program size and number, and its three transponders have broken down. Great expectations, therefore, are being placed on the BS-2b which was launched earlier this year. The BS-2b is expected to go into operation this October as the world's first full-scale broadcast satellite.

When our new service starts this fall, we will have a total of four TV channels, combining terrestrial and satellite broadcasting, plus two medium wave, one FM and two PCM Pulse Code Modulation broadcast channels. This would make NHK truly the largest broadcaster in the world.

Furthermore, what we call "High Definition Television" (HDTV) is attracting growing attention, although it is not in direct application to actual broadcasting at this time. This new generation television was developed by NHK's Technical Research Laboratory as the world's first new TV system of its kind. It features ultra fine texture images comprised of 1,125 scanning lines. It is entirely different from the conventional system and has enormous potential. Primarily HDTV has attracted the attention of the movie and publishing industries. NHK has already begun a co-production with Toho, a Japanese movie company, to make a film with HDTV, and the film is expected to be completed in the spring of '87.

NHK's energetic activities in these new fields have inevitably caused apprehensions among some quarters. NHK is concerned about our current growth which seems almost boundless. In fact, some have presented plans calling for the "division and privatization".

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Under these circumstances, NHK is now obliged to make a thorough review of its policy of sticking to its self-reliance rate of 97 per cent in program supply, and is thinking of reducing its in-house production rate to 60 per cent with the next three years.

It may be helpful to purchase more programs from overseas broadcasting organizations and also increase co-production with foreign broadcasters. But it is essential, above all, that NHK's own financial basis be further expanded and strengthened.

Recent rapid development in the field of media-electronics has ushered in the "age of new communications media". It is in fact a "technological revolution". In Japan, too, following the United States, CATV, video discs and videocassettes have become increasingly popular as new types of media. NHK has already clarified its intention to actively participate in the present "information revolution".

But here again, financial difficulties are posing a major obstacle. Satellite TV broadcasters, which NHK has understood that they are able to offer higher quality programs, have become increasingly active year after year. Nevertheless, the broadcast satellite BS-2a launched in 1984 has developed its program size and number, and its three transponders have broken down. Great expectations, therefore, are being placed on the BS-2b which was launched earlier this year. The BS-2b is expected to go into operation this October as the world's first full-scale broadcast satellite.

When our new service starts this fall, we will have a total of four TV channels, combining terrestrial and satellite broadcasting, plus two medium wave, one FM and two PCM Pulse Code Modulation broadcast channels. This would make NHK truly the largest broadcaster in the world.

Furthermore, what we call "High Definition Television" (HDTV) is attracting growing attention, although it is not in direct application to actual broadcasting at this time. This new generation television was developed by NHK's Technical Research Laboratory as the world's first new TV system of its kind. It features ultra fine texture images comprised of 1,125 scanning lines. It is entirely different from the conventional system and has enormous potential. Primarily HDTV has attracted the attention of the movie and publishing industries. NHK has already begun a co-production with Toho, a Japanese movie company, to make a film with HDTV, and the film is expected to be completed in the spring of '87.

NHK's energetic activities in these new fields have inevitably caused apprehensions among some quarters. NHK is concerned about our current growth which seems almost boundless. In fact, some have presented plans calling for the "division and privatization".
FRANCE

Leave television alone!

L
ike maniac surgeons, it's now the turn of you politicians to lean over the body of that unfortunate creature, public service television.

Like the others who have preceded you into the operating theatre, you have now decided to give her a new face and, at the same time, you want to despoil her. Like your predecessors, you have proven to be inefficient with specialists before the operation but, in reality, their advice means nothing to you.

Because the time has come for specialists— or professionals, as you like to say under pressure—however, it's too late.

And it's enough because inventive, original television won't survive another operation.

Enough is enough because you are attempting to dispose of resources and people which are not yours to dispose of.

Enough is enough because television is not the property of politicians, it's everyone's. It belongs to everyone: to all the citizens of France who saw her come into this world and have followed her youth and adolescence. And now that she's full-grown, you want to force her into roles she wasn't made for. By what right? Why? And to the profit of whom?

of NHK. At the same time, however, strong opinions persist that new ventures in broadcasting should be left for public organizations such as NHK to undertake. At any rate, there is no doubt that NHK will continue to lead the present age of new media. There is still great potential in television broadcasting. Ambitious new projects call for huge funds. Naturally, maximum consideration must be given in executing any new undertaking. One problem that may be pointed out with regard to the management of NHK is that there is still room for improvement in efficiency and productivity. NHK is an enormous organization on a nationwide scale capable of producing almost all of its programs by itself which is a great asset. It is unproblematic, however, that there are problems, arising from the changes of the times that we now have to tackle and solve. NHK is making a complete review of its organizational structure, so it can be more effectively operated by a "smaller staff of competent personnel."

Last year, we carried out a major reorganization of our news department, concentrating on covering world news. This year, we will abolish the present division system in program production and instead introduce a "unit system" for individual productions. Compared to private enterprises, productivity per staff member tends to be lower in public enterprises. We'll do our best to raise the productivity of our staff to the level of private enterprises without affecting their creativity. (Specifically speaking, NHK plans to reduce its personnel by over 20% in the next 5 years.)

It is essential in improving efficiency that subsidiary organizations be established and that they work in conjunction with their parent body, NHK. At NHK, we call these enterprises for joining operations "United Stations of NHK." We are planning to transfer as many talented members as possible to our subsidiary companies in the future.

At the same time we can not rely on receiving fees alone in coping with the various developments in the new age. Any increase in our present license fees would be extremely difficult, just as a rise in public utility charges is bound to have wide-spread social repercussions. Therefore, we are making concerted efforts to increase its secondary revenue by establishing various related enterprises under us. These new companies form the "United Stations of NHK." We mentioned before they are endeavoring to increase NHK's secondary revenue through the sales of software and various other activities. The TV documentary The Yellow River we have co-produced with China's CCTV, for example, is being sold worldwide. In fact, I am the salesman for this project. When we have become able to offer a full service via the satellite broadcast we mentioned before, we plan to ask our audience to share our financial burden by paying an extra fee.

NHK has a number of problems to solve, such as large-scale equipment investment for the new media age, improvement of its relations with audience to meet their diversifying demands and deepening of relations with commercial stations.

I firmly believe, however, that NHK, as it is today is ideally functioning as a public organization with the full support of the general public. Today, commercial stations are more conscious of the existence of NHK then ever before. We should work more closely with them for further development of broadcasting in Japan. It is of vital importance in this respect that we should be able to maintain strict neutrality and continue to work for the benefit of the public, free from political influence and commercialism. Should we fail, we will lose the vital support of the great majority of the Japanese which we have long had. It is not the government or any specific private enterprise or group that supports our public broadcasting. We must always have people's strong backing behind us.

In conclusion I would like to repeat that broadcasting should not be used as propaganda or money-making. If there is anyone in the audience, who may have influence upon President Reagan, General Secretary Gorbachev or Prime Minister Thatcher, I would appreciate if you would convey this message to them.

(Speech given at the 1986 Banff Television Festival panel, "Public Broadcasting: Who Cares?", May 26.)

Nelson

(Cont from p. 25)

works, it could be assumed that the government expected that a private network would be formed to compete with the CBC. (emphasis mine)

What's most important about this 1958 plan was that it tried to pretend as though nothing significant had happened to the broadcasting structure. The Broadcasting Act of 1958 bluntly refers to "the continued existence and efficient operation of a national broadcasting system" implying there was still a "single system" like the one constituted in 1932. But the new structure was more like two systems—one public and one private—with a referee for both.

Using the image of one big circle (the CBC) containing within itself a small circle (the private broadcasters), we can see how by removing the powers from the CBC, the Act effectively took the small circle out of the confines of the big one, made them about equal in size, and set them both between off to each other but a third entity as well—an independent regulatory agency. This radical change in the Canadian broadcasting structure was conceived but not acknowledged by the Broadcasting Act of 1958, which continued to speak of a "single system" upholding the old national public-service goals, though the private sector had been made fully competitive with the CBC and able to operate within the financial incentives of the marketplace. For its part, the CBC had been demoted to the status of competitor with the private sector. Nevertheless, it was still obliged to carry the lion's share of public-service responsibilities. Had the demolition of the CBC been accomplished by full Parliamentary funding for all its operations, CBC carriage of public-service responsibilities might have made sense. Instead, by having to rely on advertising revenues and private affiliates, the CBC was constrained by the same financial incentives that rule the marketplace shared with the private sector, while having to perform the overwhelming number of public service functions assigned to it.

The Broadcasting Act of 1968 perpetuated the illusion by continuing to refer to a "single system" of broadcasting dedicated to "safeguard, enrich and strengthen the cultural, social and economic fabric of Canada."

Since 1958, private broadcasters (in order to get and maintain their licenses) have always made glittering promises about how they will contribute to Canadian broadcasting sovereignty. But because their real goal is financial—and since the revised, but unrecognized, structure frees them to...
follow this incentive - they simply import U.S. programs because that is cheaper. The obvious reason is their own. For its part, the CRTC has seemed to think that by assisting and fostering the private broadcasting sector, somehow - perhaps cumulatively - that sector's confusion will be clear and the public broadcasting system. "It wished to use that decision that same success with its bigger circle containing one smaller that represents the CBC, circumscribed, well-bounded, and effectively curtailed.

Ostry

(Cont. from p. 27)

The numbers alone of our public membership show the high level of acceptance and support we have earned in the provincial community: about 40,000 members in 1985-6 gave us an average of nearly $400 each. Our most recent BBM rating gives us 2,750,000 weekly viewers in Ontario and Quebec - a 9 per cent increase over the previous year. Yet there is no doubt in my mind that expectations will grow more rapidly than funding. To meet the demands on us we have already become more frugal and inventive. We shall have to become more so.

THE BEST DEFENCE

I believe that the best protection a public educational broadcasting system can have is stout financial support by the province, together with excellence on our part in providing the services expected of us. Perhaps the best way to follow the policy of broadcasting for viewers and learners. I have no doubt that all is simple but humane idea that makes it easy for audiences to distinguish what we are doing from what the others are doing.

It is an idea that will be just as valid in an era of narrowing and talk-back television as it is in the present time of broadcasting, when some signals fall on barren ground, others among weeds and thorns, and only a few reach alert human minds. Thanks as now, we shall be programming not just for formal classes and for groups of more or less educationally-minded men and women, but for shut-ins and hard of hearing, for viewers and listeners from all walks of life. That is the function of television in education, to make available all that is available on the far side of the screen and to bring to the remotest places the friendly presence of a TV channel which has no designs on viewers but to serve them both as individual people and as members of the Canadian nation.

To adopt every advance in technology and in the broadest sense - in education in the service of this humane enterprise requires the continuation of a public system of broadcasting. Public broadcasting is necessary if we are to serve the educational needs of an alert, energetic and adaptable citizen.

The good news is that, given the will, the resources are available if we are capable of bringing public television to its full potential. We also have a new government which, with a little encouragement, could stand alone in the free world to communicate public broadcasting. In no other country or jurisdiction within our group of nations can that be said. We may say that, in our province, at all events, we have shown we have not yet reached a point where we have our own public broadcasting system. It is the same as discovering we have also the financial resources, without which the best will in the world is powerless, the talent idle and the potential of our enterprise unrealized.

A speech to the Association of Cultural Executives, Toronto, April, 1986.)

Hardin

(Cont. from p. 29)

The central point of the argument is that we have commercialized large parts of public broadcasting, and we have lost control of its content. This has been done at the expense of public broadcasting's unique role as a public service. The problem is not just with the CBC, but with all public broadcasters. We have allowed the public service to be commercialized.

The almighty dollar

Nothing can be more open to the Americans than what we have now. The trouble is that there is money to be made by holding back the American way in Canada and by riding on American television's back in Canada. That's how English-language private broadcasters have have refused to cooperate with us. They have fought to maintain their own control over the content of their own programs. They have refused to share power with the government. They have refused to share power with the federal government. They have refused to share power with the provincial government. They have refused to share power with the citizens who use their services. They have refused to share power with the citizens who support them. They have refused to share power with the citizens who elect them. They have refused to share power with the citizens who watch them.

The power of lobbying

There's no particular reason to be hopeful in the present context - life doesn't work out the way one thinks it should work out. What you do is always the same kind of thing you do in a hopeful situation inasmuch as you have liberty to involve yourself. You still fight for what you believe in and you still try to popularize good ideas. Really what's happening is happening not because private-sector television is a good thing, nor is it a good thing for a non-American country to have to contend with the American power, but it is simply the result of the strengthening of relative economic powers in society. To pick a case in Canada, the breweries are spending $800 million on advertising, all of which was going to television. You have this handful of large breweries, a few executive
corporate committees being able to decide how much of $80 million should be spent on Canadian television. That's why 237 members of Parliament brought up the CBC in their most recent session, noting from their constituents saying, "No way should we have Canadian content stuffed down our throats." There are some people who think that way. I don't. I think that if we're going to have any defence against being submerged by American product and against abandoning our own structures, that defence is our elected representatives and public debate and the political process.

Because policy really should be done by legislation from the House. There's absolutely no doubt in my mind that the CRTC should not be a policy-making agency. It should be the House of Commons and it should be done by legislation. By the same token, neither should a cabinet minister nor the cabinet have that power.

End political virginy

In many ways the battle has just begun. In many ways we are just beginning to realize how much it can happen and I think that's one of the very useful things that a reading of Closed Circuits will give people - it will show them how things really happened as different from the facade that one got if one only read the mass media in Canada.

Now we know what's happening and that's a step forward from the ways things were 10 years ago. We know the CRTC is a cipher that can't be depended upon. We are also getting an understanding now that television does not stand alone as an issue: it is part of a larger question of economics and political power. One thing that bothers me is that the people in the profession have always tended to shy away from talking about things in that way - you know, that's politics, that's economics, that's not us, we're in television, we're creating something in entertainment and culture - as if getting involved in the larger economic and political issue was going to contaminate them, was going to rob them of their integrity.

I think that people in the trade should lose their political virginity and should dirty their hands and get involved in those larger issues. If they put their arguments for their own industry in context, they are not going to be caught with decisions already made like the CBC cutbacks - and have to cry injustices that can't be depended upon. We are also getting an understanding now that television does not stand alone as an issue: it is part of a larger question of economics and political power. One thing that bothers me is that the people in the profession have always tended to shy away from talking about things in that way - you know, that's politics, that's economics, that's not us, we're in television, we're creating something in entertainment and culture - as if getting involved in the larger economic and political issue was going to contaminate them, was going to rob them of their integrity.

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Western Europeans today are coming to grips with things that we came to grips with, or failed to come to grips with, a long time ago. But in many ways, television has been more by not really being responsive to their publics. I don't know that much about French television but my impression is that it is very highly centralized. It certainly was the case that the journalists and the CRTC and the CBC have enjoyed has not been the case with French television. Because of that, they left themselves open to challenges from other kinds of structures, from the Rupert Murdoch's, from satellite television, from the idea of commercial broadcasting which argues that it is going to give the people more of what they want. So that part of what is happening to the traditional national broadcasters is their own fault. Now at the same time, when these kinds of challenges do happen, public broadcasters are in a position to fight back and fought back very successfully. The classic case is of course when commercial television came to Great Britain and decimated the BBC's audience. The BBC didn't just sit back and play dead and say, "Ah, public broadcasting is finished." They fought back, they fought back very hard with great skill and determination and by seeing that that was their market was. And they did succeed in recouping their position so well that they were able to make the argument that the third channel of Britain should go to the BBC and it did. So in many ways this challenge could invigorate western European television, public television, in ways that hasn't been the case today.

So we may see. I'm certainly not talking about a defeatism, but a determination to fight back, and this time with heavy armament, with the whole panoply of armament, and let the other side have it - they've had their way in the last times, while without any effective criticism or challenge for far too long.

(Excerpted from an interview with Michael Dorland, Associate Editor, Cinema Canada.)

Isaacs

(Cont. from p. 33)

Isaacs said - he said that we should seek to achieve the strengths and avoid the weaknesses of the broadcasting services that we now have in moving into the future.

So, yes, let us encourage diversity. Yes, let us seek to maximize the benefits we can get from cable and satellite, and the different sort of services and satisfactions and the internationalism that such services can provide. But let us also cherish those broadcasting institutions if they can adapt, as they need, to change, which satisfy the notions of our national culture.

National culture is a very dirty phrase, with all its resonances of the Nazi period until just a few years ago. It now seems to me to be a more than appropriate and absolutely necessary concern that societies need to express. And they are expressing those concerns in countries after country, in Europe, and they are right to do so, as they look at the possible implications of an international, a multinational, supernatural, satellite service which buys programs at an hour and pumps them, as Rupert Murdoch's Sky Channel for example is doing, into millions of homes.

What we want, then, is to move into the end of this century, is broadcasting that maximizes the satisfactions of viewers by preserving the best of what we've got and adding to it. What we don't want to do, in my judgement, however tempting the siren bugle that dere-
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