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 satelliteization. Yet long before the current neo-conservative relegation of the state, Canada had already opted for media satelliteization (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 particularity on any other terms than the 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 birthly 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, Herschel 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-television 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 Televising the Technological and the Patriarchal.

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 Keiji 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 •

September 1986 • Cinema Canada/23
Losing it on TV
by Joyce Nelson

Like the snow, Canada produces a perennial flurry of paper and words about the perennial problems of Canadian broadcasting. Not surprisingly, those problems are often embded in, and masked by, language itself. In the midst of all the verbiage, it is easy to lose sight of the problen 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 kilowatts 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-Canadian 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 that broadcasting should be a matter of national interest by reflecting Canadian ideals and culture, by promoting national unity, and by educating in the national sovereignty, it's worth considering their origins.

In order to picture the 1932 broadcasting structure created by the Act, think of a big circle (the CBC) containing within its boundaries all of the private-sector broadcasters who 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.

For example, the CBC's nation-wide network 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 38 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 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.

The CBC decided to pay the 12 private stations in its basic network for broadcasting this free programming: an absurd decision in any case. It is 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 (as well as its 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 what's more, it didn't even have any way 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 an under-funded, would continue to be further financially bled by this ridiculous payment to the private 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 lobbies 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 to compete with the CBC, and have the "right" to become affiliates of American networks. To accomplish this, the CABC began lobbying for a separate regulatory body, independent of the CBC, in order to meet these goals, all stations in anyone city shared time, all using the same 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 kilowatts 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.

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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 it on. 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 indigeneous software, to keep its screens its 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 licences 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 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 Broadcast 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 direction 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 reflected a fundamental misunderstanding of the broadcasting structure and, not surprisingly, under Diefenbaker, the CBC's long tradition of control and management of broadcasting was reduced or eliminated.

The Commission concluded that the CBC had failed to manage the board and itself 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 the CBC Act of 1958 were to regulate the CBC to control the broadcasting service; to provide a public service; to make the CBC as we ll as possible.

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...to reduce our budget without reducing program services.
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 advanced democracies of the west, public broadcasting, like most forms of public investment for social goods, is being criticized, more often attacked, starved of the subject of the CBC’s extinction, sold off. This is bad news, as I take it, because public broadcasting in any country takes years to develop and bring to fruition. If it is killed off because of a sense of radicalism in search of free markets, such as we seem to be undergoing at the moment, it may never recover, it may never be revived. The disappearance of public broadcasting must be bad news, because without it audiences lose freedom of choice. Without it they no longer have any possibility of choosing between broadcasting that threatens them mainly as markets and delivers them in their own homes to advertisers and salesmen, and broadcasting that respects them mainly as viewers.

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 whisper of complaint when Ottawa killed the CBC monopoly 30 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 recently asked 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 asked that when watching TV in the U.S., until recently, was free of commercials. I shall be discussing PBS in a moment. But first we may well ask whether commercials are really such a bad thing. I think it is only understandable that every institution should have a source of support.

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 understand this charge and to have been present at the discussions by which Parliament did what it passed the present broadcasting legislation with only one dissenting vote in 1968. It is also an optimistic view because we are optimistic about this country. We are optimistic about this country. We are optimistic because we believe 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 there is a brisk, continuing market for devices that silence them. And by the way, this particular is certainly not free. It may be interesting to quote George Gerbrner on this question, dean of the Anneberg School of Communications. He said in a New York Times article in 1982: “Television is the new state religion, run by a private Ministry of Culture (the three U.S. networks)...financed by a form of hidden taxation wherein the free content they wash, not when you wash, and whether or not you care to watch...” The point is well taken. Soap springs eternal.

But to return to PBS. Anyone who has watched it recently must have noticed the amount of time spent begging — “shaking the tambourine”, as Fred Friendly called it — to raise funds from its own audiences. In addition, it becomes obvious that what were once plain announcements of support from corporate contributors are edging ever closer to commercials. And since PBS is the largest system in the world. Nearly everyone in the U.S. watches public TV. The average viewer spent more than 50 hours a week watching public television for more than ten hours a month; 78.9 per cent of U.S. households viewed public TV in the month of March, 1985. Total income for public TV in the U.S. is nearly eight hundred million dollars.

Despite this wide 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 damage that catches the eye, but over the years it always has — except in those periods when, for some reason or another, it decided that Canadians couldn't do drama, or others decided that it couldn't. The sense of Canadian television one gets now is that it's so commercialized now — the schedule doesn't have that feeling of a difference, an integrity it used to have. The proliferation of new channels are 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 broadcasting only exists 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, distinct, reflecting the community and allowing Canadians to express themselves as individuals, as artists, or citizens who are involved in their community's affairs, that vision of Canada as an independent broadcasting organization seems to be any, even remote, balance, then we had to focus on ways and means of increasing publicly-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 wealthy 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 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 a 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 represented a certain stability, a certain solidity, 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, working group. The Saskatchewan Credit Union Movement, 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. There was an eenie-meenie citizen and you see all that togetherness, all that organization, all one's homework done well-prepared — what the CRTC always said. You have 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."
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 to exist. You can't destroy them because that would be destroying our own objectives. The trouble with that was that it meant maintaining in place inappropriate kinds of licensees, particularly for English-speaking Canada. But you had another kind of objective: 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 1950s 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 to the government process as a whole. There is the realisation that public financing versus private financing was one of the good things that has been happening. There is the realisation that decentralized activity is a good thing and 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

(Cont. on p. 36)
ILL 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 NAME ASCENDING FOUR TO ONE. AND IN SPITE OF A SURVEY TO THE CONTRARY BY COLUMBIA LAW SCHOOL, IT IS PRETTY OBVIOUS THAT THE AMERICAN SYSTEM OF MEDIA OWNERSHIP IS ONE SYSTEM, AND PUBLIC SERVICE IS ANOTHER. THAT FACT THAT THEY DID NOT TAKE, AND WE SHOULD NOT ALLOW THEIR REPUTATION, OR THE SUBSEQUENT ARGUMENT TO DEFECT US FROM AN IMPORTANT TRUTH.

PUBLIC BROADCASTING IN HIGHLY CENTRALIZED SYSTEMS IS AN EMBARRASSMENT. IT FORCES UPON THOSE SYSTEMS A DEGREE OF POLITICAL SUPERVISION AND THE CONSEQUENT 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 TO LEARN THAT PUBLIC SERVICE BROADCASTING IS NOT FREE OR THAT IT FALLS UNDER STATE SUPERVISION. YOU WOULDN'T HAVE HEARD THAT VERY OFTEN BEFORE, BECAUSE NOT MANY PEOPLE HAVE BEEN WILLING TO SAY IT.

OUR TELEVISION SYSTEMS ARE HEAVILY SUPERVISED. IT IS SUPERVISED DIRECTLY FROM A LAW THAT SAYS, FOR INSTANCE, THAT THE TELEVISION MUST IMPART IMPARITY IN MATTERS OF PUBLIC POLICY. AND THE SUPERVISION OF THAT LAW IS HANDED OVER TO A PUBLIC AUTHORITY - IN THE CASE OF THE INDEPENDENT BROADCASTING AUTHORITY (CBA), AND IT STAYS INSIDE THE HOUSE BY THE BBC. BUT THE TWO SYSTEMS ARE CLOSELY SIMILAR AS ANY OBSERVER CAN SEE. NOW THIS LAW IS MEANINGLESS IN THE SENSE THAT IT MAY NOT BE APPLIED AT A TIME WHEN PEOPLE HAVE A THOUGHT 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 IS EFFECTIVE TO WORRY ABOUT ANYTHING THAT UPSETS THE GOVERNMENT OR UPSETS POLITICIANS OR IS CONSIDERED IN ANY WAY TO BE UNCONFORMABLE TO THE ENVIRONS OF WESTMINSTER. IT'S A POLITICIAN'S PRIVILEGE. BROADCASTING, HOWEVER, BECOMES ONE OF THE SALONS OF THE 20TH CENTURY WHERE TRAINING A CADRE OF ELITISM AND DEVELOPING IT IS A POLITICAL DUTY. AND IN THE FACE OF THIS REALITY SEEMS FIRST OF ALL, THAT WE ARE IN AN AGE WHERE THE BEST CULTURE OF ALL TIMES HAS NEVER BEEN IDENTIFIED BY A MINORITY AND HAS NEVER BEEN ENJOINED BY A MAJOR POPULATION AND HAS ALWAYS BEDERED SUBSIDY - THIS THEORY IS ABSOLUTE RUBBISH. IF YOU LOOK CAREFULLY AT THE WORLDS OF THE GREAT WORKS WE HAVE BEEN ENJOINED BY THE TORTURE OF THE POPULATION AND MOST OF THEM WENT AWAY WITHOUT PUBLIC SUBSIDY. GIUSEPPE VERDI HAD AS MANY PEOPLE AT HIS FUNERAL AS ELVIS PRESCLEY DID.

BUT THERE ARE TWO QUALIFICATIONS; ONE, NOT EVERYTHING THAT IS GOOD IS RECOGNIZED. SO YOUR LITTLENAMES AND YOUR EMILY DICKINSONS AND YOUR... 


THE POINT IS THAT THIS SUPERVISION EFFECTIVE TOWARD THE SAME OPINION TO A Sphere FROM PEOPLE WHO MIGHT GO FOR BRITAIN. THERE IS A SENSE WHERE WE CAN ACTUALLY THINK WE HAVE REACHED THE MOMENT IN BRITAIN WHERE WE CAN ACTUALLY THINK RADICALLY ABOUT BROADCASTING. THIS MOMENT MAY NOT HAVE BEEN ARRIVED AT IN OTHER COUNTRIES. BUT IT DOES SEEM TO HAVE BEEN REACHED WHERE WE 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 ARE NOT ENJOINED BY A MAJOR POPULATION, AND THERE IS A DEGREE OF REGULATION THAT IS NECESSARY.

IT IS NONSENSE TO PRETEND THAT EVERYONE WHO TALKS ABOUT REGULATION IS IN FAVOUR OF SMALL, HIGHLY MONOPOLIZED AIRWAVES WHERE EVERYONE TRIES TO USE THEIR AIRWAVES IN THEIR OWN WAY. THAT IS NOT THE CASE AND IT FALSELY ARGUMENTS IF IT IS ADVANCED IN THAT WAY.
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 I expect they can be quite naive and I expect they're probably quite facile and easy to implement. The second thing you would do is to have some kind of franchise for national channels to do that. Now a sensible approach would be to lease those channels to people for a limited period and allow them to provide a service. How would you structure diversity in the system? For a start we would make damn sure that those leases were reassessed every decade and the regulatory authority was not captured by the leaseholders.

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 efficient, 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 democratize 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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In Any Vision Calgary Has It All!

**WHY CALGARY?**

"Well, it's my third time in Calgary, and I was very well treated and very happy on 'Superman III.' The co-operation we had from the Alberta Government and the City of Calgary was marvelous. From the police to the townspeople, everyone was so generous in allowing us to come in and interfere with their lives. It seemed to be a wonderful place to shoot.

You have a wide variety of scenery within an hour's drive of Calgary and plenty of hotel rooms for a crew. I enjoy working with the Canadian members of the crew. I know many of the people in each grade. It made for a nice homecoming and you don't have to introduce yourself on the first day of shooting. There are many reasons, certainly economics cannot be ruled out. It is considerably cheaper without any loss of quality.

Calgary has no retail sales or accommodation tax, and has regular air service to most major cities in the U.S.

For further information on shooting in Calgary contact:
David Crowe, Manager, Film Industry
Calgary Economic Development Authority
PO. Box 2100, Station M
Calgary, Alberta T2P 2M5
Telephone (403) 268-2771

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On 'Finders Keepers' starring Lou Gossett Jr, Beverley D'Angelo and Michael O'Keefe; Director Richard Lester answered the question
I can't match David's elegant and elaborate argument and I begin therefore with the poet Dryden: "O All, all of a piece throughout, thy chase had a beast in view, thy worlds brought nothing about but lovers were all true, 'tis well an old age is out and time to begin anew."

David Graham clad in white samite, mystic, wonderful, proclaiming the end of an era in broadcasting. Heralding a new dawn, raising a banner elegantly marked 'Freedom' and summoning us to follow. I look at him and I listen to the moderation of his counsel and the elegance of his choice of phraseology. I look at the band that he has gathered around him, individual producers who also believe in freedom who wish to contribute to the diversity of broadcasting in Britain and other societies in the world. Who want to provide varied fare, who want to encourage diversity of opinion, who want to experiment with a multiplicity of new styles and I'm terribly tempted to follow. Anybody up in broadcasting who isn't tempted to go back to the coal face and start making programs again, hadn't really ought to be in broadcasting. I look at him and his supporters and I'm tempted but I have to decline.

When I look at the massed ranks of those in the big battalion that attend behind this knight errant on horseback and his companions, when I look at the people who really want to do down and to introduce total deregulation in broadcasting, as ambitious a troop of mercenaries that ever held up a gravy train, I turn around and I want to go in the opposite direction.

All of us who practice broadcasting or care about it in a free society must applaud the aims that David set out. We want the maximum choice and the maximum freedom, for communicators to be able to utter. We want a diversity of views to be offered in a powerful medium of communication. We want voices to be heard and to be listened to. We also want the maximum choice, and the maximum satisfaction. I'm talking about free societies, not societies that seek to restrict the choice available to their citizens, but we also want the maximum choice and the maximum satisfaction for viewers and listeners.

Broadcasting doesn't exist for broadcasters, however elegant their garb or language. It exists to provide satisfaction to audiences. And broadcasting, private broadcasting which doesn't satisfy audiences goes out of business, and public broadcasting that doesn't satisfy audiences should be put out of business.

It ought to be our aim to maximize the choice that is available to viewers and to extend that range of satisfaction. We can all, I hope, agree on that end. The question is to achieve it. David Graham says and he has said it, I may tell you, in rather more absolutist terms than he chose today, terms perhaps more suitable to the Adam Smith Institute in London, where he said that deregulation is the sure and speedy way to achieve that maximization of choice and satisfactions. Today he said 'marketers well handled.' I'm not an economist, but I think one of the difficult things about listening to people who place such heavy reliance on the market is that one never knows whether they are arguing from the notion of a perfect market (which never did exist, does not exist and never will exist), or whether they are arguing from the evidence of any market that we can recognise. I have to say to David Graham that if he is arguing from any market that he can actually recognise — that is working in the real world, a real world of transactional pressures, of commercial pressures, as well as the ambitions of program makers and the satisfactions of audiences, then I wish he would name it and tell us where it is that we have to look for the evidence that might persuade us that the drastic solutions that he proposes have any kind of validity or relevance for us.

Where is the evidence that this market works in the way in which he would like to think it works? Does the evidence exist in the United States? We have in the United States hugely powerful and successful systems of broadcasting which provide vast enjoyment and satisfaction to mass audiences. We also have in the United States an ongoing concern to try desperately to add to the range of subjects covered, the range of themes developed, the range of genres exploited, the range of voices that can be heard, make themselves heard in some sort of small scale against the part of the networks.

We have a public broadcasting system which finds it difficult enough under a compliant presidency to survive and extremely difficult under one which for ideological reasons has it in for the public broadcast ethic. And I personally find, living in a free society, the endless appeals for funds for public broadcasting in the United States demeaning and distressing. It ought to be possible for the richest society in the world to find a better way of strengthening the range of its television than that one.

Does the evidence exist in Australia, where a national broadcasting system fallen on hard times is struggling to sustain itself against a market that contains three powerful competitors? The situation is very similar in some ways to the United States except that they play British programs as well as American programs.

Does it exist in Italy? An interesting example where there was a dawn of freedom and everybody thought they could run their own television station in city after city. And everything went. What we have now in Italy is a very powerful, private force which has made Italian broadcasting, in less than a decade, as opposed to the monopoly that would rise, we now have the monopoly that is RAI and Signor Berlusconi.

So in the marketplace it is terribly difficult without some degree of protection, without some degree of regulation, without some degree of public intervention in the cause of publicly desirable ends, that the sort of diversity that David Graham is advocating. And indeed had I been a believing member of the Adam Smith Institute, pledged to support its aims, sitting, listening to David when he put his argument to them some weeks ago in London, I might have expected to find myself on my feet cheering him for 19/20ths of his speech, when all of a sudden I would have looked very hard at the platform to make sure that the speaker wasn't standing on his head, because of all of a sudden he was advocating a protected, regulated, subsidized channel in order to ensure that some variety of political opinion, that some utterance that had some respect for contending opinions in a society was actually allowed to continue to exist. And having talked about total deregulation, David towards the end of his argument and indeed towards the end of his argument today, comes clean and admits he knows that the sort of programs that he makes for British television could not possibly succeed in any market-clowning, publishing environment known to man.

You will find the arts on cable, you will find gardening on cable, you will find a range of consumer satisfactions on cable, you will find dirty movies on cable. What you will not find, in answer to market prerogatives, is the free discussion of issues and themes and ideas in a way in which it is possible in British broadcasting regulated as it is.

On Channel 4, at the end of the news every night, a citizen, whoever he or she may be, can come forward. Some- time or other, someone is going to provide space in this market for Mr. Peter Tatchell to advocate that Her Majesty's forces should mutter rather than carry out (what he believes to be) unlawful instructions! Who is going to provide the funding for the sort of program that David does, in which political reporters of opinions and convictions and guest editors of a variety of political stances, come forward and tell us how to look at the world?

Every society must work out for itself what sort of broadcasting it wants. And every society has to do so in contexts which are particular and peculiar to itself. But I think that David has to show that what he has to say will provide more satisfactions than what we at Channel 4 have. I rather doubt what he seems to be saying, 'swap away the old, wing in the new and we will all be happy.'

Let me say something very briefly about Channel 4. We provide a whole range of a different mix of programs and we play these programs in peak time and in accessible hours and are able to do so, are protected in doing so, by the price we receive for the use of our money. It is unique, it is unlikely to be copied in any other society in the world. It is a peculiar British compromise. It consists of letting one group of people make a fortune by giving them a monopoly in commercial television, a monopoly of television advertising unthinkable in Canada, unthinkable in the United States, and then taxing that monopoly, taxing the revenues of that monopoly to provide a very different sort of service.
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 plurality, but I believe it to be a vitally important role in a democratic society which recognises the pluralism of opinion which David and his company does for people across the 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 the 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 now is 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, use the BBC services every single week. My basic point – and here to my amusement I find myself agreeing to-

(Cont. on p. 37)
I would like to take this opportunity to explain a little about some of the basic problems now faced by NHK, Japan Broadcasting Corporation, and tell you how we are trying to cope with them. Let me tell you first of all what sort of organization NHK is.

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. So, altogether, we have five channels for our audience all over 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 personnel. 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.

People's sense of value has become diversified in keeping with the drastic 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 along with those with broadcasters in the United States and Europe have become increasingly active year after 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 show a greater interest in sports programs. Programs featuring the Olympic Games and other big events seriously affect NHK’s finances. By the way, I am having a hard time negotiating for the broadcasting rights for the Calgary Winter Olympic and Seoul Summer Olympic games for 1988 on behalf of the Japanese broadcasters. It took me over two years, precisely seven meetings with Mr. Uberoth, to reduce the rights for the LA Olympic games in half.

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 micro-electronics has ushered in the “age of new communications media.” It is in fact a “technological revolution.” In Japan, the BBC in London, the United States, CATV, video discs and videotext 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, our financial difficulties are posing a major obstacle. Satellite TV broadcasters, which NHK has until now been able to offer higher quality programs, are increasingly active year after year.

When our new service starts this fall, we will have a total of four TV channels, including 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 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 1987.

NHK’s energetic activities in these new fields have inevitably caused apprehensions among some quarters. This NHK is indeed trying to keep pace with the growth which seems almost boundless.

In fact, some have presented plans for more financial support of the general public.
FRANCE

Like 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 gone for improvement 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 – to undertake a surgery you despise her and all those who have given her life, namely, the public.

Enough is 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 undeniable, 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, consolidating the 12 divisions into four. 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 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 raise 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” I 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 than ever before. We should work more closely with them for further development of bidding 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 general 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.

Brief by the Syndicat français des réalisateurs de télévision, presented at the FISTAV executive committee meeting, Montreal, June 1986.

(Cont. from p. 25)

Leaving television alone!

Nelson

What’s most important about this 1958 plan was to make it clear that it tried to pretend as though nothing significant had happened to the broadcasting structure. The Broadcasting Act of 1958 blythe 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 the powers of the CBC were effectively taken away from the private broadcasters. The Act effectively took the small circle out of the confines of the big one, made them appear bigger than they actually were, and put them under control of the CBC. This is as true in Canada as it is in the USA.

Briefly stated, the Act of 1958 reconceived the broadcasting system by giving the CBC the power to make decisions about what can be said and how it is said and allowing the CBC to make these decisions without the interference of the private sector.

Cultural commercial stations are 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 accompanied 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 unacknowledged, structure frees them to...
follow this incentive – they simply import U.S. programs because that is cheaper and easier than producing 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 sentiments would be brought into alignment with the public sector. The Globe & Mail, in short, might add up to something significant enough to prove that there is indeed a “single system.”

In fact, there is no “single system” for broadcasting in Canada; there was, at least in structure and in theory, but the 1958 Act effectively abolished it, while pretending nothing had been changed. This pretense – maintained by valiantly reiterating the old broadcasting goals (which actually did fit the old structure), while insisting on the existence of a “single system” – progressively eroded Canadian broadcasting sovereignty.

To use an analogy: the human body is a single system. Its various parts cooperate and coordinate to maintain life. Though we may speak of the nervous system and the circulatory system, these various functions do not compete with one another. If they do, the body dies. In broadcasting, the private sector does compete with the CBC. In the original intention, the CBC was contained, bounded, and kept in place so that its energies might contribute to the health of the whole. But the 1958 Act changed the structure and freed the private sector to be independent. Unfortunately to have acknowledged the 1958 structural change would have clearly opened up a huge can of worms.

The myth of the “single system” worked extremely well for the private sector – if one excludes itself, may account for the refusal to acknowledge the structural change. The private broadcasters have been fostered and pampered over the years by a regulatory agency bent on keeping the CBC in its place (if not that small). Unfortunately to have acknowledged the 1958 structural change would have clearly opened up a huge can of worms.

In 1980, for instance, the CRTC allowed the merger of Canadian Cable systems Ltd. of Toronto and Premier Communications Ltd. of Vancouver, creating a corporate cable-TV entity three times larger than any other cable firm in Canada. To those who opposed the merger, the reason given was that the publishers had separate and distinct 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 period last 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

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 most important thing to do is to follow the policy of broadcasting for viewers and learners. I have no doubt at all that it is this 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 narrowingcast 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.

As far as now, we shall be programming not just for formal classes and for groups of more or less educationally-mind men and women, but for shut-ins and hard of hearing: for viewers and learners in far-flung places, for the lonely and the estranged as well as for the successful, and busy urbanites. It is the aspiration of TVOntario to offer all our citizens access to knowledge and entertainment of all kinds, to follow the policy of broadcasting for viewers and learners, 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 persons 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 continuance of a public system of broadcasting. Public broadcasting is necessary if we are to serve the educational needs of an alert, energetic and adaptable citizenry.

The good news is that, given the will, the CRTC is 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 contribute to 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 a willingness to proceed. Discovery that we also have 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)

central Canada the idea of public broadcasting was too closely associated with the CBC by itself.

In any case, the idea of decentralized as well as centralized organization in television is now accepted. In the 1970s one risked being branded a traitor for these ideas. The Trudeau era was extremely damaging that way and I myself came to have an almost visceral dislike of that whole regime and that whole cast of characters and I’m somebody who is a nationalist, who wrote a book on Canadian federalism, Nation Unarmed, who speaks French, who always defended Canadian things and who was very, very happy to have Trudeau elected and have those people come in because it allowed a part of the country to share power that should have been shared a long time ago.

Well, that’s all gone but thank God we’re not paranoid now about Canada. We have to do things where they live both locally and provincially.

The almighty dollar

N

othing can be more open to the Americans than what we have now. The trouble is that there is money to be had by following the American way in Canada and by riding on American television’s back in Canada. That’s how English-language private television has ridden to the rescue of the back of the American television and film system in Canada. When a controversy occurs, or a debate occurs, about, say, Canadian content, then that is an aspect of the federal government and on its decision-making apparatus. The citizens as a whole aren’t involved, they are too remote from it all and there are some citizens whose ire can’t be directed to attack any Canadian measures. This doesn’t mean necessarily that Canadians don’t have or don’t see the need for having their own culture, but they have no way of getting to

getter and speaking to each other. So what happens is though the official centralized process is very much in favour of Canadian objectives, those objectives are overlooked. The eventual resolution of lobbying forces impinged on the Ministerial decisions. The CRTC eventually just extends the American system. When you have more decentralized structures, as well as centralized ones, they provide ways and means of exerting pressure and pressure is good and together and to express their Canadian objectives in their own way. Then when the crunch comes you do have some kind of an opposing political force against this sellout to American television.

One of the things that I realised was how local citizens’ organizations trying to change things at a national level were bound to fail and that the Canadian Radio League, which led the debate in the original radio days of Alan Plaut and Graham Spry, wasn’t really a model for what was needed now because it was actually quite a small group of people in days when the Canadian government was much more elitist than it is now and the old tradition of political centers of public opinion and action was in a sense a rare historical juncture where the newspapers were also in favour of public broadcasting because their sources of advertising revenue were threatened. Anyway the Canadian Radio League succeeded in getting the original radio legislation into place but then very quickly more or less dissolved and from that point on it was ideal to stay at the fringes and begin to be eaten by commercial radio lobbying and television and became the system we have today.

That’s why I like the idea of provincial broadcasting organizations and viewer-governed organizations where there is at least some kind of structure. When you’re involved in an actual organization you can say, “Well, we’re going to do something which we believe is important” and say, “We can’t do this because the government has given orders.” That can be a good reason for citizens to get involved. And it would represent a counterbalance to the political power and the lobbying power that now exists on the other side.

The power of lobbying

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here’s no particular reason to be hopeful in the present context – life doesn’t work out the way you think it should work out. What you do have is that those same kind of things 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 countries to have to contend with the American system. It is simply the result of the strengthening of relative economic powers in society. To pick a case in Canada, the breweries are spending $80 million on advertising of all kinds, a good part 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 the kind of power nobody else has, not even CBC headquarters. Again, I don't like to come back to it all the time but that's a reflection of where economic, and hence political and cultural, power is. There's an element of the lever oneself with much more resources than the Mothers Against Drunk Driving are able to. And we are in a very mercantile age, where willy-nilly the holders of money and the others like advertising agencies are taking over more of everything, including what used to be the cultural sector. Anybody who is really interested in changing things can't be so unenlightened about this: they have to realise that if they're going to be critical about what's happening with television in Canada, then they are wasting their time. They can have until hell free but CBC should have more money or that public broadcasting is being abandoned, it won't do a damn bit of good. Why not get back to the leverage that the brewers have over television expenditure and that god-awful, aggressive commercials on television are not only unnecessary economically but are also really offensive to a viewer trying to watch a hockey game, then they're getting to the root of the matter. And there's absolutely no reason why the brewers, to stick to that example, or why advertisers and their agencies in general, should have that power and the rest of us shouldn't have.

In some cases, legislation can be very effective. The Broadcasting Act is a positive case, but in practical terms the Act was very weak in its implementation through an agency and that's one of the great ironies. The virtue of the CRTC was it was supposed to be independent of politics. But there is very little that is specific in the Broadcasting Act - it doesn't say anything about the percentage of Canadian content that should be included in a program, or the very preciousness of that which was supposed to be its virtue. It is actually its weakness.

Another sad thing in this whole skein of events is that because of the extraordinary power given to the CRTC, new stations are not licensed, and there is not required parliamentary debate and public debate. New laws of television licenses have been added without legislation, hence without affording well-reasoned criticism. Another attack on the House of Commons or the criticism of an opposition political party that might be interested, or even the awareness of the government of the day or the Minister of Communications, that something is happening. Because it wasn't done by legislation, but was done instead by regulatory agency, a lot of things have happened that wouldn't have quite so easily happened if the government had thought that the debate been visible to the general public. That reflects another change in my own view from the time I first got involved when I considered that the CRTC was important, a supposedly independent agency, was lacking in oversight of the industry. It is upon things rational and not be caught up by demagogic outcries against Canadian content. I quickly realised that the best defence of Canadian content is public debate at the highest levels, even if people might say, well, Members of Parliament, most of them are dummies who care in to a large degree about 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 virginity

In many ways the battle has just begun. In many ways we are just beginning to realise how things really 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 in face of that. After the decision was made and when nothing can be done. So maybe they have finally learned their lesson and realise what the real kind of argument has to be put - I hope so.

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, that's where we stand in Canada today. You've read with the whole panoply of challenges for far too long. 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 satisfaction and the internationalization that such services can provide. But let us also cherish those broadcasting institutions if they can adapt, as they need to, to change, which satisfy the notions of our own 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 more than an appropriate and absolutely necessary concern that societies need to express. And they are expressing those concerns in country after country, in Europe by referendum, and they are right to do so, as they look at the possible implications of an international, a multinational, supra-national, 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, as we 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 gglulators are blowing, is eliminate our present good broadcasting, we want to preserve what's best in it and add to it. And if we haven't got the adequate broadcasting that we seek in a particular society then we need to add now to what we've got.

What we don't want to do is to sweep away everything we've got for the sake of the unproven assertions of a market heaven which I do not expect to live to see.

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

Isaacs

(Cont. from p. 33)

ially with something that David Graham said - he said that we should seek to achieve the strengths and avoid the weaknesses of the broadcasting system 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 satisfaction and the internationalization that such services can provide. But let us also cherish those broadcasting institutions if they can adapt, as they need to, to change, which satisfy the notions of our own national culture.

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