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, signal-y 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, 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 consideration 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 Keiji Shima describes some of the pressures impinging upon the future of that nation's public broadcasting system. Yet

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

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 are 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 its 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 90 watts of power or less, while many American stations boosted 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-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 that broadcasting should be considered the national interest by reflecting Canadian ideals and culture, and by educating in the broadest sense of the word. Finally, the 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 lobbies argued 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 CRL saw it, were to be subsidized by receiving the public stations’ network programing.

In the midst of these varied proposals and interests, Parliament passed the first Broadcasting Act in May of 1932. It established the publically owned Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CRTC), which would become the CBC, and gave it two major functions: to regulate all broadcasting in Canada and to itself engage in broadcasting. The CBC was to be funded entirely by Parliament, which could purchase existing private stations as well as construct new public ones.

Superficially, the broadcasting system established in 1932 seems like the nation-wide radial network of the Canadian Radio League. In fact, by giving the CBC the powers to both broadcast and regulate all broadcasting in Canada, Parliament made the public broadcaster a 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 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 CBC was not adequately funded to exercise the structural powers it had been granted. For example, when the CBC set up its new radio network in June 1932, there were six publicly owned and operated stations, and 32 private stations, in the network. By 1936, when the CBC became the single public 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 Canadian broadcasting, 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 one. 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 distributive 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 programming: an absurd decision in any case, but 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 (or 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 its supervision of the system 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 many of the CBC’s station 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 plans 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, as the described role of the government.

In no uncertain terms, the Commission stated: Broadcasting in Canada, in our view, is a government-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 private sector of our broadcasting system. That these citizens should enjoy adequate security or compensation for the actual monies invested in them, they are permitted 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 rights to broadcasting, any property rights in broadcasting.

Shortly thereafter, however, the bright prospects for the new medium of television gave fresh impetus to the private broadcasters. Parliament, however, ignored the pronouncements of the 1949 Massey Commission. Reappointed to consider the role for television in Canada, the Massey Commission in 1951 continued to urge that the CBC retain all regulatory and broadcasting powers, that private stations be licensed only after the CBC had established a national service, and that all private stations be required to serve as outlets for that programming.

The government of the day seemed to feel a special urgency about television. In December 1952, after only two years of operation (Montreal and Toronto), the government announced: “Now that television has started, it should be extended as widely and quickly as possible to other cities. Nevertheless, however, it is within the specific political roots at the time, can partially be accounted for by the technological bandwagon mentality characteristic of modernity. In particular, colonized countries seem to feel that by amassing the latest hardware pedalled by the United States, they will thereby gain entry to First World status.
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 Défi mondial. Commercial revenue continued strong, administrative expenses were cut. The CBC's long tradition of service led to its being appointed host broadcaster for Expo 86 in Vancouver.

But we 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 the CBC's management to cover these various situations and makes the general direction taken is appropriate. The funds seem to have been found by cutting or consolidating management and by efficiencies in the program 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 falling 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 reminders 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 created a separate, independent broadcasting regulatory body – the Board of Broadcast Governors (BBG), which later became the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC).

In his book The Public Eye: Television and the Politics of Canadian Broadcasting, 1952-1968, political scientist Frank Peers described the significance of the new Act:

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 network stations.

(Cont. on p. 35)
PUBLIC BROADCASTING

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 the bad news first. Here, then, is the bad news. Throughout our legislature, we have an advanced democracy 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 and 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 surge of radicalism in search of freer 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 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 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.

Parliament in the Broadcasting Act are very noble and very demanding. Moreover, the demands made upon the CBC by political authorities at all levels of government and by the public are constant and very high. And they are all consistent with the Act.

My experience over 35 years of criss-crossing this country is that Canadians want the CBC. This becomes most obvious when they think that they may lose a few minutes of CBC radio or television programming on the networks or in Thunder Bay or Rimouski or Calgary. The reaction is even stronger when there is any possibility of losing a station, as we found out when we led the study of government may be well advised to consider the CBC's application, as did the Halifax City Council.

Two weeks ago the corporation appealed before the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) to argue for the retention of its AM radio service in Halifax. The moment was critical when we asked to close our station in Gander.

The Nielsen study group had this to say on the mandate of the CBC and on the related issue of funding.

"The complexity of the operation and the uncertainties of the future role of the CBC lead the study team to conclude, however, that the government will be well advised to refrain from laying any more cuts against the operational budget of the CBC until it has had an opportunity to review and, perhaps, revise the CBC's mandate.

I'm afraid I have to report to you that maintaining CBC services at the level prior to the budget reductions is not possible.

Obviously, the duty of management was, and still is, to try hard to reduce 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 see 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 were cut disproportionately, 50 percent 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 doubled from the year 1980 to 1985 (from 5.1 percent to 10.2 percent). In the executive group, there was a fivefold increase during the same period. Five of 15 positions at the vice-president level are now filled by women.

We are also pleased by the fact that the government has appointed more 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 responsibility that the CBC must indeed be a 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 give them a positive perspective as Canadians have always welcomed the private broadcasters, and we think 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 market is certainly not free. It may be interesting to quote George Gerbner on this question, dean of the Annenberg School of Communication, he said in the New York Times on March 19, 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 which the average viewer pays whenever you wash, not when you watch, 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 the airwaves of public stations, PBS is the largest TV system in the world. Nearly everyone in the U.S. watches public TV. The average viewer watches public TV for more than ten hours a month; 78.9 percent of U.S. households viewed public TV in the month of March, 1985. Total income for public TV in 1984 was 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 done that catches the eye of some reason or another, it decided that Canadians couldn’t do drama, or others decided that it couldn’t be done. The sense of Canadian television one gets from CBC 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 may be 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, Darwinian, reflecting the community and allowing Canadians to express themselves as individuals, as artists, or citizens who are involved in citizens’ affairs, that doesn’t go down the chute. When I originally got involved in the early 1970s, one still had a belief in those possibilities; they were still part of certain common assumptions that people made, and that’s all changed in the last 10 years or so.

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 post-war period that kind of backdrop 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 time of 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.

Understanding the CRTC

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 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 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 commercial 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.

The CRTC accommodated itself 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 relationship between 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, it’s an example of citizen and you see all that together, all that organization, all one’s homework done well-prepared – what the CRTC always said they 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’.

An academic at Princeton, 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 – disenchantment with the bureaucratic 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 an involution. What he 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, 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 and to be paying 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 invulnerable and artistic: there was Harry Boyle, Jacques Hebert, and Northrop Frye, distinguish people. This was a different beginning from the outset.

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 a great deal of idealism. 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-out of an Order in Council. Then the CRTC decided that it had to make a cleaner house 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 exhaust itself, and the issues are the questions. At the same time the people that are being regulated do not aggressively and brutally 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 to exist. You can't destroy them (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 happened to the government process 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 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)
BRITAIN

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 mail running 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.

Public service broadcasting in highly centralized systems is an embarrassment. It forces upon those systems degrees of political supervision and the necessity of cultural conformity which are not desirable things. It prevents those systems from achieving the freedoms appropriate to communications in an advanced liberal society.

Now it may surprise Canadian audiences that British television 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 broad­

The point is that this supervision effectively controls an opinion to a sphere 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 where training a cadre of officials, the letters in his mail running 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.

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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.

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 change 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 naive and I expect they can be quite facile and I expect they can be shot to ribbons. But what you might do is to stop anyone program to them by others. Another thing you would do is to 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 lease is a product of previous political decisions and every market exists within a situation that is a product of previous political decisions and every market exists within a situation that is a product of previous political decisions. Now that might be taken advantage of. 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.

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

On ‘Finders Keepers’ starring Lou Gossett Jr, Beverley D’Angelo and Michael O’Keefe; Director Richard Lester answered the question

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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 plurality, 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 held up as an example to others, and that is, of the budgets available to us, we try to spend 90 per cent on programs and only 10 per cent on our own administration. We failed last year – we held up as an example to others, and only

try to spend 90 per cent on programs and 11 per cent on administration. When I look at the difficulties that national broadcasting institutions face which know before they start that 60 - 70 per cent of their monies are going to have to go into keeping the plant going, then I sympathise with them and I believe that our system does have something to offer. We now 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 manage its resources efficiently, manage its own corner. It cannot or will not do. And thirdly it has to be able to manage its resources efficiently, manage 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 and care about music, 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 viewers, 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-

(Cont. on p. 37)
NHK: The public is the best defence

by Keiji Shima

"NHK as it is today is ideally functioning as a public organization with the full support of the general public. It is of vital importance 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."

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 the constant demand for satellite-relayed international news coverage as well as a need for information on expanding international relations. As a news-reporting organization, 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 ¥6,100 (U.S.), which gives us an annual revenue of about ¥217 million (U.S.). This is equivalent to 97 percent of NHK's total annual budget. There have recently been some households who have failed or refused to pay this fee. Still, we have an extremely high license-fee collection rate of more than 90 percent. 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 taking place in people's view of NHK.

One reason for this is that with the remarkable development of the nation's economy and cultural advancement, commercial broadcasters, who rely heavily on revenue from advertisements, are increasingly powerful and have become able to offer higher quality programs produced in-house. In particular, the public now show a greater interest in sports broadcasts. Programs featuring the Olympic Games and other big events seriously affect NHK's financial balance. 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. I hope to take over in less than two years, precisely seven meetings with Mr. Uheroth, to reduce the rights for the LA Olympic games in half.

Under these circumstances, NHK now obliged to make a thorough review of its policy of sticking to its self-reliance rate of 97 percent in program supply and is thinking of reducing the in-house production rate to 60 percent 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 microelectronics has ushered in the "age of new communications media". It is in fact a "technological revolution." In Japan, too, we have seen two of its three transponders 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, 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 for 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. This NHK's viewpoint is that these new advances will further expand and strengthen NHK's position as the world's number one public broadcaster.
FRANCE

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 despise her. Like your predecessors, you have promised to improve 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 yourselves - 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 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 opinionists 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 the introduction of new 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 understood, 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 made more effectively operated by a "smaller staff of competent personnel."

Last year, we carried out a major reorganization of our news department, consolidating its 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, production 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 the reality of the new structure. 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.)

You politicians, leave her alone. She needs to get her strength back, not so that you can sell her off, but to be herself and to be us.

Above all, no more surgery.

She has survived many a trial; she has survived tumbling into a large fund. She has been infected upon her. But, this time, she won't.

Understand, you politicians, that there are crimes that go unpunished. Cultural crimes.

But they remain written forever in the memory of nations. Enough is enough, you politicians, leave television alone!

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 blandly 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 the reductions in regulatory powers from the CBC, the Act effectively took the small circle out of the confines of the big one, made them equal in size, and set them both between off all with each other but a third entity as well - an independent regulatory agency. This radical change in the Canadian broadcasting structure was created 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 now 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. Nevertheles, it was still obliged to carry the lion's share of public-service responsibilities. Had the demotion 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 for them. The CRTC has seen this and is acting on 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 concerns are being addressed.

The CRTC has been a firm in Canada. To those who opposed the creation of such a large entity, they simply worked extremely well for the private sector - cheaper than producing their own. For others, it is a significant addition to the private broadcasting in Canada. At one time, “single system” did fit the old structure, while insisting that by assisting and fostering the private sector, perhaps cumulatively - that sector’s contribution to the stated national goals had been changed. This pretense - once abolished it, while pretending nothing had changed. This pretense - once abolished it, while pretending nothing had changed.

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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, which is about one percent of the population. Our most recent BBM rating gives us 2,750,000 weekly viewers in Ontario and Quebec - a 9 per cent increase over the period 1984-85. 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 people have is our broadcasting system. We can have stoush financial support by the province, together with excellence on our part in providing the services expected of us. Perhaps the best argument in favor of the policy of broadcasting for viewers and listeners is that we are doing 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 for now, we shall be programing 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 in far-flung places that are too lonely and the estranged as well as for the successful, and busy urbanites. It is the aspiration of TVoOntario to offer all our citizens access to knowledge and to offer a rich diversity of cultures, 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 technical ability, and the resources, 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 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 that we are prepared to do what we have to do to make this 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 attitude 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, A Nation Unaware, 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 used to have it, when you’re in an organization that makes programs or that, if you like, those who can actually do that, then there is a good reason for citizens to get involved. And it would represent a counter-balance to the political power and the lobbying power that now exists on the other side.

**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 the Japanese and the American in way in Canada and by riding on American television’s back in Canada. That’s how English-language private television is riding on 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 can enter into federal legislation 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 role is to try 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 together and speaking to each other. So what happens is that the official centralized process is very much in favour of Canadian objectives, those objectives are overlooked. The eventual resolution of lobbying forces impinges on the Minister and the CRTC eventually just extends the American system. When you have more decentralized structures, as well as centralized ones, they provide ways and means for Canadians to get 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 Broadcasting League, which led the debate in the original radio days of Alan Plaut and Graham Spry, wasn’t really a model either. It was seen then as 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 provincial and national was by then this was a rare historical juncture where the newspapers were also in favour of public broadcasting because their sources of advertising revenue were threatened. Anywhere the Canadian Radio League succeeded in getting the original radio legislation in place but then very quickly more or less dissolved and from that point the ideal was to try to go to the edges, be taken into commercial radio lobbying and television and became the system we have today.

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 that makes decisions or who can say we don’t want violent children’s programming so we’re not going to have it, when you’re in an organization that actually can do that, there is that good reason for citizens to get involved. And it would represent a counter-balance to the political power and the lobbying power that now exists on the other side.

**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 in any particular case is 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 countries to have to contend with the American models. In short, 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 in all kinds, a good part of which was going to television. You have this handful of large breweries, a few executive
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 façade 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 these things. 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 cutsbacks — and have to cry injustice at the end of the day, after the decision was made and when nothing can be done. So maybe they have finally learned their lesson and realise what 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, if you will, a long time ago. But in many ways, we've managed to do it. They were not really 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 who worked for the CBC and the BBC 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, 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 broadcasting fought 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 die — and play dead and say, "Ah, public broadcasting is finished." They fought back, they fought back very hard with great skill and determination with a very clear idea of what their targets were. 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 mean, it can be a defeasibility, but a determination to fight back and this time with heavy armaments, with the whole panoply of ammunition, 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* 

tually with something that David Graham said — he said that we should seek to achieve the strengths and avoid the weaknesses of both systems. Now that that we now have in moving into the future.

So, yes, let us encourage diversity. Yes, let us peer to maximum profiteering, we can get from cable and satellite, and the different sort of services and satisfactions and the internationalism that such services can provide. But we let us also cherish those broadcasting institutions if they can adapt, as they need, 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 appropriate and absolutely necessary concern that societies need to express. And they are expressing those concerns in countries after countries, and they are right to do so, as they look at the possible implications of an international, a multinational, supranational, satellite service which buys programs at an hourly 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, is to repeat the siren bugle of deregulation; is to blow those arguments is public debate. 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.

(See p. 37 given at the 1985 Banff Television Festival panel, "Public Broadcasting Around The World: Facing the Conservative Wave.")
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