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, neo-conservatism has begun to overturn the main pillars of the preceding liberalism: deficit spending (in the civil economy but not the military economy); state interventionism (in the civil economy but not the military – hi-tech – economy); and public broadcasting (in the political economy of mass culture).

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

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

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

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

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

But one of Canada’s leading broadcasting critics, Hertschel Hardin, author of the path-breaking book A Nation Unaware (1974) and more recently Closed Circuits: The Sellout of Canadian Television (1985), a withering attack on Canada’s deregulatory agency, the Canadian Radio-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 Televison, 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

A Cinema Canada dossier

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
Like the snow, Canada produces a perennial flurry of paper and words about how to regulate broadcasting.

In the midst of all the verbiage, it is easy to lose sight of the problem that is absolutely central to the Canadian broadcasting morass. The crucial phrase, enshrined in the 1968 Broadcasting Act, is the statement that Canadian broadcasting consists of a single system. Because the confusion surrounding those two words has so confounded Canadian broadcasting sovereignty, it’s worth considering their origins.

In the mid-1920s Canadian broadcasting was chaotic: three or four radio stations in any one city shared time, all using the same frequency, 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 serve the national interest by reflecting Canadian ideas and culture, by promoting national unity, and by educating in the broadest sense of the word. Finally, the Aird Commission recommended that the national government become involved in order to meet these goals, all broadcasting being 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 CAB saw it, were to be subsidized by receiving the public stations’ broadcast products. Moreover, they would have been 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 network programming. At the time, this was not deemed problematic. Indeed, this form of distribution was probably seen as the most practical and effective way to reach Canadians. Moreover, as the regulator of the system, the CBC would see to it that the private stations continued to exist only as circumscribed adjuncts.

Ultimately, in its supervision of the CBC to regulate and control the national broadcasting system, Parliament simultaneously refused to grant enough funding for the CBC to actually exercise those powers. The CBC, for example, held the power to regulate and control the nation’s broadcasting system, yet was structured in such a way that it could not function solely as a national broadcaster. The CBC’s network programming consisted of a single system designed to meet national goals. Nevertheless, the CBC decided to invoke the private stations to its basic network as well. 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 were required to air the programming, most of the supplementary network private broadcasters usually did too. Apparently, the CBC’s programming was not only well-funded but also consistently good and highly popular.

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

Broadcasting in Canada, in our view, should be directed and controlled in the public interest by a body responsible to Parliament. Private citizens are permitted to engage their capital and energies in the national regulation and supervision of this body. That these citizens should enjoy adequate security or compensation for the actual moneys invested by them to make this public enterprise work (or even in its supplementary works, compete with the CBC, and have the “right” to become affiliates of American networks. To accomplish this, the CBC began lobbying for a separate regulatory body, independent of the CBC, and the circumstantial role of the private sector. In no uncertain terms, the Commission stated:

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 consumption-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.

The government of the day seemed to feel a special urgency about television. In December 1952, after only two years of operation, the CBC announced: “Now that television has started, it should be extended as widely and quickly as possible to other areas. Given its obvious technological and political superiority, it seemed to feel that by amassing the latest hardware pedaled by the United States, they will thereby gain entry to First World status.

The bright prospects for the new medium of television gave fresh impetus to the CBC’s planning. In December 1952, after only two years of operation, the CBC announced: “Now that television has started, it should be extended as widely and quickly as possible to other areas. Given its obvious technological and political superiority, it seemed to feel that by amassing the latest hardware pedaled by the United States, they will thereby gain entry to First World status.
The tragic flaw, however, is that there is always a significant lag between hardware implementation and indigenous software production. The rush to get the technology in place creates a vacuum; the technology is there; but there is nothing to put on it. This is the situation that the U.S. entertainment industry depends on, with its glut of software, programming, movies that almost immediately flow into any available space. Green Gables and impressive software, to keep its screens its lightful entertainment of Anne of the four more publicly owned TV stations, were the audiences for those programs, were at a high. 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 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 reflect a fundamental misunderstanding of the broadcasting structure, and not surprisingly, under Diefenbaker, the Broadcasting Act of 1958 removed regulatory powers from the CBC and granted them to a separate, independent broadcasting regulatory body—the Board of Broadcast Governors (BBG), which later became the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC).

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 native dialects for the North, have never been better. The comments we get from everywhere, including the press, support this view. So do our audiences. I’ll give only a few examples. Anne of Green Gables reached an audience of more than five million people on our English network; better than any imported American program in last fall’s peak season. Le Temps d’une paix on our French TV network reached two million every week; for a similar success, an American program would have to reach 80 million people, considering the difference in the size of our French population. On our English radio network, Morningside reaches an average of one million people a week. In Montreal, a market where there are 10 AM radio stations, the CBC French AM station comes second, according to the most recent radio survey.

As for our regional stations, in the course of an average week, over five million Canadians watch our English and French regional television news programs and more than two million tune in to our English and French early morning radio programming. I think that our staff in the region and in the network should receive recognition for their dedication to their task and their remarkable achievements in the course of the last year.

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

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

The performance of the corporation, in what has been a testing time for everybody, has been recognized by the Nielsen study group which said in its report:

"The study team has reviewed the actions taken by CBC’s management to cover these various situations and thinks the general direction taken is appropriate. The funds seem to have been found by cutting or consolidating management and by efficiencies in the program operation."

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 fulfilment of the mandate given to the CBC by Parliament—and therefore on the level of services that the Corporation can provide.

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

I should take this opportunity to say that, during this period, the staff of the CBC has continued to perform remarkably well. There are constant remarks in the press about the morale of the CBC staff. Considering the drastic staff reductions and the uncertainty we are going through, this is hardly surprising. However CBC programs on both radio and television, in English, in French, in 12 foreign languages on shortwave, in
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 Legislature and in every other forum, the advanced democracies of the West, public broadcasting, like most forms of public investment for social goods, is being criticized, often attacked, and betrayed by the subject of the CBC's extinction, sold off. This is bad news, as I take it, for the advanced democracies of the West, 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 dis-

appearance 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 monetary thirty years ago. However, the current North American and European animus against public broadcasting destroys a hard-won balance. And thus it deprives viewers of a choice.

The ATTACK on Public Broadcasting

Let us take a look at the scene today in broadcasting. And since I have admitted bias, I invite each of you to go to the public library and check the facts for yourselves. Let us begin with the United States, our neighbor, trading partner and chief supplier of television programming. A British critic once remarked 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 remark was on the mark, but unfortunately on a channel, until recently, was free of commercials. I shall be discussing PBS in a moment. But first we may well ask whether confession is really the mark of a true prophet, whether it's not such thing as a free lunch. Well, if commercials are not a nuisance, we have to wonder how it happens that their presence is not.

The Nielsen study group had this to say on the average number of hours per week of CBC programs on the air. The appearance 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.

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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 going down that path. The channel by channel, story by story, over these ten 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 do. In the sense of television, one goes from CBC that is 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 broadcastings only exist on any scale in three of four provinces, and a lot of it is institutional programming. That’s all right, but the fact is a whole dimension of Canadian television isn’t fully realized. We don’t have a federal 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, unique, reflective of the community and allowing Canadians to express themselves as individuals, as artists, or citizens who are involved in citizens’ affairs, that channel was lost.

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 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 television was going through a very independent phase. It wasn’t part of the American Empire yet, and it had more or less

weaned itself from the British Empire, although R.B. Bennett and others still had traditional, British Empire conservative ideas. In terms of real power in society, economic power and so on, Canada was between two empires. Also because of the circumstances of the Depression, there was a very progressive mood in Western Canada, and that mood met with a Red Tory mood in Ontario and a traditional mood in Quebec. The notion of Canadians not just needing, but being capable of having a broadcast system truly of their own was very much a whole.

In the postwar period that kind of backstop has been coming apart. I think we’ve arrived now, with the free-trade discussions and the intensification of non-national materialism, at a point where the assumptions, the language and the rhetoric which existed in the ’30s and continued to carry on through the Massey Commission and beyond to the Aird, 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 domino 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 be very far unless there is a much wider sense of what needs to be protected overall.

The structures of power

What I and others discovered in the 1970s was that other structures – private financing structures – just weren’t appropriate and this conflicted with certain ideological assumptions about the need for a private sector and doing things through the private sector of the economy. We 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 very 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 part of general ideological curve in the country. So, again, the real possibilities for Canadian television are being shut out by a much larger debate.

Understanding the CRTC

The CRTC accommodated itself to those who represented a certain stability, a certain solidarity, a certain financial permanence because those kinds of organizations seem to be safer to give assistance to. There were exceptions; they gave a license to CITY-TV in Toronto, for example, but ultimately even Moses Znaimer and CITY-TV had to sell out to CHUM, a larger organization. The CRTC didn’t grapple with the real questions. One of the most interesting episodes, and one of the most telling ones, was the case of the cooperation with cable movement in Saskatchewan which not only consisted of very well-organized local cooperative organizations, particularly the Saskatoon Cable Cooperative which had the support of most of their community, but also consisted of a very, very practical, stable, well-organized movement. And 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 back down, you say to yourself: ‘What’s the use of doing it again?’

Understanding the CRTC

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 crisis. It 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 day it was established, 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 the CRTC was supposed 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 intellectual and knowledgeable and artistic: there was Harry Boyle, Jacques Hébert, and Northrop Frye, distinguished people. This was a different breed of a more liberal economist.

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

What was happening in television was simply an expression of what's happening in the government as a whole. The idea of an intelligent and wise public service grew up with the federal public service in the 1930s and the creation of a Canadian Department of External Affairs. Now it may be a myth that that civil service was noble, bright and innovative and that they took unto themselves the best principles of public administration. Nevertheless it was a myth that I, as a student of political science in the 1950s, grew up with. That the Canadian federal civil service at the policy-making level was something to be admired. What happened to the CRTC, I think, is a reflection of what's 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...
Il 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 favour were 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.

In 1967, when THE BROADCASTING in highly centralised systems is an embarrassment. It forces upon those systems degrees of political supervision and the necessity of cultural conformity which are not desirable. It prevents those systems from achieving the freedoms appropriate to communications in an advanced liberal society.

Now it may surprise Canadian audiences the BBC never have had to say that the BBC from Britain 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 — the independent broadcasting authority (IBA), and it is managed inside the house by the BBC. But the two systems are closely similar as any observer knows. Now this law is meaningless in the sense that it may have been drafted at a time when people thought opinion or the handling of opinion could be done in an unbiased or objective way. No intelligent commentator in broadcasting now believes this to be the case. So what the regulator does in effect is worry about anything that upsets the government or upsets politicians or is considered controversial or seems to advance a point of view. And this results in endless interference of programs and the banning of some.

The point is that this supervision effectually controls 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 twentysome or the deferential courtiers. Now this is not a healthy system, nor does it mean that public service broadcasting does not do anything. It imposes a massive cultural conformity on the output of the media in Britain. It has therefore managed to establish a reputation that in some respects the future will decide is out of proportion to its real achievement.

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

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

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

Now I would ask you to accept two qualifications - first of all, the best of culture at all times has only been identified by a minority and has never been enjoyed by a mass population and has always needed subsidy — this theory is absolute rubbish. If you look carefully back, you will find that most of the great works have been enjoyed by the population of the popular franchise. Its cultural history begins with Matthew Arnold and Walter Bagehot and their anxieties about what democracy would do to the culture of the British nation and its politics. They advanced the theory that if you gave the masses the benefit of the best of human thought, you would actually get over the divisive divide between government by an intelligentsia representing a minority, and government by bodies representing a mass electorate.

But there are two qualifications; one, not everything that is good is recognised. So your Haworths and your Emily Dickinsons achieve posthumous greatness and thank goodness they went on and did their work without an audience. And also a lot of what is enjoyed is not very good either, there's a lot of rubbish about.

Now I think one of the good things that public service broadcasting does is encourage a stream of adequate quality. It doesn't take risks with the good and the bad on the scale that a less regulated system would. Now I think these are important points and I think they are points that we should bear in mind as we try and work out where the future might go for Britain. There is a sense that we have reached the moment in Britain where we can actually think radically about broadcasting. This moment may not have been arrived at in other countries. But it does seem to have been reached where I come from. We are attempting to reach a policy for the future.

Now there is a lot wrong with the American system — it is pretty obvious that the First Amendment rights have not been fully protected. Michel de Certeau's criticism - therefore a degree of regulation is necessary. It is nonsense to pretend that everyone talks about deregulation in favour of some level of control. It is simple to see that the massive concentration of power at the sources of program production and that owned by the major communication systems. We should therefore try and achieve the strengths and avoid the weaknesses of the best systems around.

So what my policy for broadcasting would be is first of all, that we are in an age where we no longer face the scarcity of resources in the airwaves and we do not face a scarcity in the ability to achieve the means of production. Means of communication are there and the tools are within reach of many more people than when broadcasting was first designed. So the appropriate policy in the face of this reality seems first of all to accept what our economies have proved; that we are in an age someone from the BBC has called the third age of broadcasting, where innovation is the key to commercial production. It has the further advantage in that it removes the embarrassment of excessive power by structuring diversity into the system and therefore removes the need for political supervision and control.

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

Now what would you do to implement that policy? How would you implement a policy that actually stimulates the maximum diversity of production? It involves time when we have so many weaknesses and avoid the weaknesses of the best systems around.

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Now what would you do to implement that policy? How would you implement a policy that actually stimulates the maximum diversity of production? It involves time when we have so many weaknesses and avoid the weaknesses of the best systems around.
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 facile and I expect they can be quite naive and I expect they're probably quite facile and other people.

Is first of all make our first objective the imperatives defined by the society 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.

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 anyone program producer taking a disproportionate part of the output.

These are all ideas in keeping with the twin objectives of the maximum choice and 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 public affairs programs, I'd suggest one standardized channel run very much like Channel 4 and it serves the purposes of setting the standard if those who make decisions about the system think that it is at all necessary.

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

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

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

by Jeremy Isaacs

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

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

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

But basically good public information services commend themselves to people who matter. Broadcasters need, and indeed it’s part of my notion of the role of public broadcasting, to satisfy particular interest groups. They can hang on to 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 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 constant demand for satellite-related international news coverage as well as a need for information for Japanese citizens. 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. NHK now annually conducts more than 5,000 satellite relays of international news. Moreover, we plan to obtain our exclusive transponders over the Pacific and Atlantic before the end of this 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 broadcasts. 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. Uheroth, to reduce the rights for the L.A. 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 the 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 to 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, too, as in the United States, CATV, video disc, 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 unwillingly learned the hard way how to do so, are an enormous-scale project costing a total of 42-million dollars (U.S.). Nevertheless, the broadcast satellite BS-2a launched in 1984 has developed into one of its three transponders have broken down. Great expectations, therefore, are being placed on the BS-2b which was launched earlier this year. The BS-2b is expected to go into operation this October as the world's first full-scale broadcast satellite.

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

Furthermore, what we call "High Definition Television" (HDTV) is attracting growing attention, although it is not 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-fast 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. They are concerned about our constant growth which seems almost boundless. In fact, some have presented plans calling for the "division and privatization"
FRANCE

Leave television alone!

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 an operation that will change the face 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 become doctors. And it's enough because inventive, original television won't survive another operation.

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

Enough is enough because television is not the property of politicians, it's everyone's. It belongs to everyone: to all the citizens of France who saw her 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 indispensable, 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 12 divisions into four. This year, we will abolish the present division system in program production and instead introduce a "unit system" implying there was 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 reforee for both.

Using the image of one big circle (the CBC) containing within itself a small circle (the private broadcasters), we can see that if the 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 beginning off at the same time but a third entity as well - an independent regulatory agency. This radical change in the Canadian broadcasting structure was achieved but not acknowledged by the Broadcasting Act of 1958, which continued to speak of a "single system" upholding the old national public-service goals, though the private sector had been made fully competitive with the CBC and able to operate within the financial incentives of the marketplace. For its part, the CBC had been demoted to the status of competitor with the private sector. Nevertheless, it was still obliged to carry the lion's share of public-service responsibilities. Had the 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 flattering promises about how they will contribute to Canadian broadcasting sovereignty. But because their real goal is financial - and since the revised, but unknown, structure frees them to...

(Cont from p. 25)
follow this incentive — they simply import U.S. programs because that is cheaper than developing 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 creativity and excellence will result. The “Globe-and-Mail” full gob 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 has been, 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, the circulatory system, the digestive 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 structure, 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 free.

Unfortunately to have acknowledged the 1958 structural change would have clearly opened up a huge can of worms. No wonder legislators who had not (and since) have preferred to pretend nothing had changed.

The myth of the “single system” worked extremely well for the private sector: it was what they needed to protect themselves, as well as themselves, as well as to defend Canadian things and who was something special by virtue of being Canadian. The Trudeau era was extremely damaging that way and I myself have no doubt in my mind that Canadians don’t have or don’t want violent children’s programming so we’re not going to do things that can actually do that, then there is a need for citizens to get involved.

Well, that’s all gone but thank God it’s over. 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 have no doubt in my mind that Canadians don’t have or don’t want violent children’s programming so we’re not going to do things that can actually do that, then there is a need for citizens to get involved.

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 we 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 broadcasting that existed. It was 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 quickly more or less dissolved and from that point onward we began to fray at the edges, began to be eaten into by commercial radio lobbying and television and became the system we have today.

The Myth I like the idea of provincial broadcasting organizations and viewer-governed organizations where there is no least some kind of structure. When you’re involved in an actual organization you can’t say we can’t say we don’t want violent children’s programming, so we’re not going to do it. We’re not going to do it. What we’re not going to do is to have an organization that has an official policy or a group policy or a group decision or a group fiat. And it would represent a counterbalance 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 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 in Canada learned to rely on the remains of the public system. The result is that the federal government and on its decision-making apparatus. The citizens as a whole aren’t involved, they come from the network and there are some citizens who have to deal with my 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

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 the world 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 country to have to contend with the American system. I think it is simply the result of the strengthening of relative economic powers in society. To pick a case in Canada, the breweries are spending $800 million on advertising 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 that is being used to take 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. The key is that until hell freezes over, the government of the day or the Minister in whose portfolio broadcasting falls, should not have that power to do with the Canadian broadcasting system. They have too much at stake. That reflects another change in the Canadianization process, with the CBC and the BBC having enjoyed a new lease on life, and hence political and cultural, power is. The breweries are able to underwrite $80 million, but was done instead by the CRTC.

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, the way the CRTC should be very powerful and that 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 situations that arise are not always fought for, and under a relaxed view of public debate. New levels of television have been added without legislation, but was done instead by the CRTC. And hence political and cultural, power is. The breweries are able to underwrite $80 million, but was done instead by the CRTC.

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