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 repatriations 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-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 breathlessly 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, Hertsch 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 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

A Cinema Canada dossier

"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

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to regulate all broadcasting in Canada. Not surprisingly, those problems are often embedded in, and masked by, language itself. In the midst of all the verbiage, it is easy to overlook the single problem that is absolutely central to the Canadian broadcasting morass. The crucial phrase, enshrined in the 1968 Broadcasting Act, is the statement that Canadian broadcasting consists of a "single system." Because the confusion surrounding those two words has so confounded Canadian broadcasting sovereignty, it’s worth considering their origins.

In the mid-1920s Canadian broadcasting was chaotic: three or four radio stations in any one city shared time, all using the same frequencies and there was bitter in-fighting for the few available frequencies the U.S. had left to Canada. Moreover, most Canadian radio stations had only 900 watts of power or less, while many American stations boasted 50,000 watts and were beginning to gain network affiliates in this country. It was in this context that the first Royal Commission on Broadcasting, the Aird Commission, was appointed in 1927.

The Aird Commission took a strong pro-Canada stance. When its report was released in 1929, the Commission expressed concern that Canadian private commercial broadcasters were not interested in serving underpopulated sections of the country and were broadcasting mainly American programs. It declared that broadcasting should serve the national interest by reflecting Canadian ideals and culture, by promoting national unity, and by educating in the broadest sense of the word. Finally, the Aird Commission recommended that in order to meet these goals, all broadcasting be nationalized as a publicly owned corporation independent of government.

Despite widespread support for this recommendation, two 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' revenues and by commercial advertisers.

In the midst of these varied proposals and interests, Parliament passed the first Broadcasting Act in May of 1932. It established the publicly owned Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CRBC), which would become the CBC, and gave it two major functions: to regulate all broadcasting in Canada and to itself engage in broadcasting. The CRBC was to be funded entirely by Parliament, and it 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 the Canadian Radio League. In fact, by giving the CBC the powers to both broadcast and regulate all broadcasting in Canada, Parliament made the CBC a public broadcasting 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-boundaried and structurally overridden by the powers and goals of the public-service CBC.

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

In practice, however, Parliament did not recognize what it had created. From its inception, the CRBC was not adequately funded to exercise the structural powers it had been granted. For example, when the CRBC set up its own corporation in March 1935, there were six publicly owned and operated stations, and 32 private stations, in the network. By 1936, when the CRBC became the CBC 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 it created, 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 as 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 way to reach the CBC’s audience. Moreover, as the regulator of the system, the CBC would see to it that the private stations continued to exist only as circumscribed adjuncts.

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

For example, the CBC’s nation-wide distribution system consisted of a basic network and a supplementary network. In the 1930s, the basic network was composed of six publicly owned stations and 12 privately owned stations. The supplementary network consisted of 20 private stations. All of these 38 stations received, free of charge, three hours of CBC-produced non-commercial programming each evening. This was clearly a boon to the private stations because, at no cost to themselves, they were assured of filling a substantial portion of their 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. Yet, especially so in terms of the broadcasting structure. As regulator of a single system designed to meet national goals, the CBC could quite simply have required that all stations in its basic network (and its supplementary network as well) broadcast the programming. Instead, by paying the private stations to do so, the CBC implied that it didn’t have the power to regulate, and, therefore, couldn’t make all stations do something outside the single system. In retrospect, we can see that this decision was a disastrous one, both politically and psychologically. It also ensured that stations, 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 broadcasters 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, which assumed the role of the single system.

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 circumscribed role of the private sector. In no uncertain terms, the Commission stated: broadcasting is, in our view, a public service, directed and controlled in the public interest by a body responsible to Parliament. Private citizens are permitted to engage their capital and energies in the broadcasting enterprise, in recognition of the service that they believe is necessary, to take over the management of private broadcasting.

Yet while the private sector had grown to 75 stations in 1936, when the CRBC became the CBC, with its public-service goals, and been granted structural powers it had been granted, Parliament simultaneously refused to grant enough funding for the CBC to actually exercise those powers. This may explain why the CBC, itself, almost from its inception, struck a self-destructive note in its relationship with the private-sector stations.

The Rudd Report, which was released 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 licence application (Montreal and Toronto), the government announced: “Now that television has started, it should be extended as widely and quickly as possible to other areas. However, in order to avoid any 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.
P U B L I C  B R O A D C A S T I N G

The tragic flaw, however, is that there is always a significant lag between hardware implementation and indigenous software production. The rush to get the technology in place creates a vacuum: the technology is there, but there is nothing to put on it. This is the situation that the U.S. entertainment industry depends on, with its glut of software, programming, movies that almost immediately flow into any available space. A country has to protect that interval, that lag between hardware and software, to keep its screens of its own. Quite literally, a country has to keep the technology (in this case, TV) turned off until its own software production has geared up fully and can fill the available air-time, which also must be managed according to the availability of indigenous product. These factors are crucial during the start-up period for a new technology, but the overriding impulse is simply to get the technology in place as quickly as possible. This is what happened in the early 1950s as the Canadian government rushed to extend television "as widely and quickly as possible to other areas," after putting in place only two public CBC stations. The technology-fetish overshadowed other concerns. Parliament provided funding for only four more publicly owned TV stations, and the government announced that the private sector could apply for licences in all other areas of the country. This was essentially a repetition of the radio situation of the mid-1930s. By ignoring its broadcasting history, the country was doomed to repeat it. Was the CBC to control the broadcasting structure as created by the Broadcasting Act of 1932? The government seemed to be saying: yes and no. Were the private stations permitted to exist only as censured to the CBC's national TV service? Again, the government was ambiguous.

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

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

Once again a Royal Commission, reporting in 1957, reiterated the position that all Canadian broadcasters constitute a single system in which "the private broadcasters are a complementary but necessary part... 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 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 CBC 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 net-

As Canadian as possible under the circumstances

by Pierre Juneau

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

The 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 Déliv mandial. 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 show falls 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 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 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

11 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; another five million on our French net, North, South and East. For a similar audience in the U.S. market the cost of a show of this magnitude would be at least triple the market we have. The success of the CBC French AM station, on our French network reached two million every week; for a similar market in the U.S. would have to reach 80 million people, considering the difference in the size of our French population. On our English radio network, Morning Side 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 obligation 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

(cont. on p. 35)
TVOntario: a counter-strategy

by Bernard Ostry

I have good news and bad news for you. Since most of us seem to like happy endings, I am going to give you the bad news first. Here, then, is the bad news. Throughout the technically cause public broadcasting in any country takes years to develop and bring to cover, 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

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 re-doing so-called overhead expenditures.

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

In spite of recent reductions, the CBC has made remarkable progress in the employment of women. In the senior management category, the participation doubled from the year 1980 to 1985 (from 3.1 per cent to 10.2 per cent). 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 fact 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 have a positive perspective as the Canadian broadcasting system is one of the oldest in the world. When Parliament did it passed the previous broadcasting legislation with only one dissenting vote in 1968. It is also an optimistic view because we are optimistic about the future of public broadcasting and its role in the country.

We understand that financial difficulties sometimes present themselves and have to be faced. But our board felt strongly that a plan for the future of Canadian broadcasting should be imaginative and enthusiastic one. We are encouraged by the fact that most of the reactions to our ideas and proposals were positive.

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

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

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

In such a context, I suggest, the importance of the role of the CBC is greater and greater. All the facts show that an intelligent and forward looking attitude towards Canadian contributions to Canadian broadcasting by Canadian authors, composers, performers and artists of all kinds, is through the CRTC.

Those of us who have some responsibility for Canadian broadcasting, whether in Parliament, in the CRTC, in the CBC or in private broadcasting, will be judged according to the high standards established by R.B. Bennett in 1932 or by the parliamentarians of 1968 who united to pass the Broadcasting Act or by people such as Graham Spry.

They were concerned with the "complete control of broadcasting from Canadian sources," with the "cultural, economic and political fabric of Canada," with the "understanding of ourselves and the world."

Therefore in remembering the best moments of this last year on the CBC – and since this is the 50th anniversary of the CBC, of the last 50 years – we can be confident that the Canadian creative community can provide us with a lot more excitement, and a lot more understanding of ourselves – if we ask them. (Speech by Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau before the Commons Committee on Communications and Culture, Ottawa, May, 1986).
Television is the new state religion run by a private Ministry of Culture... financed by a hidden form of taxation without representation.

— (George Gerbner)

phase out federal funding for PBS. Of the $214 million authorized for the Corporation of Public Broadcasting in 1988, U.S. President Ronald Reagan has called for a $44 million cut. Again, the $238 million authorized for 1989 is to be slashed to $130 million. At first glance this desertion of public broadcasting by the federal government might not seem vitally important. But the federal money is catalytic to the enterprise. It is primarily money that levels development and growth above the market rate. Since it stimulates matching grants from state governments. True, the largest contributors are state governments, with 21.7 per cent of the budget. But federal parsimony must be seen as creeping wind. The doctrine that the business of America is business has never been stronger: to the indoctrinated eye, public broadcasting looks like an anomaly, a symptom of creeping socialism.

In Britain, where for years socialism has been under no constraint to creep, since it is able to sit on the front benches of government, public broadcasting is sharing in the general propaganda war, which has given way to a new strategy of focusing attention on the privatized sector. The BBC, like all the commercial networks, is struggling to keep pace with the rapid growth of public-service broadcasting. The overwhelming demands of the new media, together with the success of the European Community's television network, have made it clear that public broadcasting must be strengthened. But it is not just the public-

I hope I have said enough to suggest that educational broadcasting is by nature both traditional and progressive. Our place in the world of education, broadcasting? We are public broadcasters and we are part of the public education system, serving Ontario. This public television, in turn, will contribute to the renewal of the public broadcasting enterprise, which are networks for consumers, providing markets for advertisers.

This network of ours for viewers is broadcasting at a time when communications technology is in a state of flux and change. The arrival of new delivery systems, such as pay-TV and specialty services, is changing the broadcasting scene. We are exploiting the new technologies of satellites, computers and VCRs. We are making increasing use of private film producers. In this period of change and innovation, TVOntario is emerging as a leading broadcaster, providing a new dimension to high-quality learning systems.

BROADCASTING AND EDUCATION

This is the point where we find ourselves. Television, this powerful medium which has become a central influence in our children's lives, now routinely enhances and enriches in classroom and home materials. Over the last ten years TVOntario has become an important facility in educational research through careful investigation of the mass media and the methods of teaching. Reliance on research and testing while planning programs is what makes our product uniquely useful to learners. TVOntario’s programs and accompanying learning materials are used in more than 90 per cent of our schools, elementary and secondary. We have become the second or third largest network with a circulation of more than 30,000 schools. TVOntario is the largest producer/distributor in the U.S. instructional television market. It dominates that particular market.

TV0's involvement in international co-productions such as The Final Chapter, Alvin Toffler's 3rd Wave, The Miracle Planet, The Leading Edge and the new science consortium called Science View - which includes West Germany, NHK, Sweden, France, Italy, Britain and the U.S. - has given TVO the reputation of being a significant broadcaster respected beyond our borders. It is fair to say that TV0 has become a cultural symbol, standing for what is excellent and distinctive in our country.

Our success in finding and serving audiences has brought with it danger of expanding expectations. We do not have the funds to do anything that is expected of us. Business and the public at large have responded generously to our appeals for funds; governments have been supportive. Our efforts to earn revenue by selling our productions have also been encouraging.

(Cont. on p. 36)
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 things that catch the eye these days, but over the years it always has – except in those periods when, for some reason or another, it decided that Canadians couldn’t do drama, or others decided that it couldn’t. The sense of Canadian television one gets 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 or 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-bottled. 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, distinctive, reflecting the community and allowing Canadians to express themselves as individuals, as artists, or citizens who are involved in citizens’ affairs, that even 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 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 CRTC, first chairman of the CRTC, and Harry Boyle, the vice-chairman, have really begun to fade. It’s almost a whiner 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’s going to go very far unless there is a much wider sense of what needs to be protected overall.

The structures of power

What I and others discovered in the 1970s was that other structures – private financing structures – just weren’t appropriate and this conflicted with certain ideological assumptions about the need for a private sector and doing things through the private sector of the economy. We 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 an American company.

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

Understanding the CRTC

The CRTC accommodated itself to those who 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 CITV in Trail, for example, but ultimately even Moses Znanier and CITY-TV had to sell out to CHUM, a larger organization. The CRTC didn’t grapple with the real questions. One of the most interesting episodes, and one of the most telling ones, was the case of the cooperative cable movement in Saskatchewan which not only consisted of very well-organized local cooperative organizations, particularly the Saskatoon Cable Cooperative which had the support of most of their community, but also consisted of a very, very practical, stable, well-organized group. The Credit Union Movement in Saskatchewan, which was underwriting the cooperative plans, plus the Cooperative Guarantee Act of the Saskatchewan government, which gave a guarantee 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. You see that all those organizations, all one’s homework done, well-prepared – what the CRTC always said. You have the support of your community, the proper financial backing – when you see that shot down, you say to yourself: “What’s the use of doing it again?”

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 – and the part that the various arrangement was not doing what it was supposed to do and an outcry on the part of citizenry – then into adulthood and maturity and finally into senility. It was written in the ‘50s about the American scene, yet it was, detail for detail, a description of the CRTC and how, almost to the letter, it is the same. So it is quite appropriate to look at the real structural change that was supposed to be done through the private-sector devices. And it isn’t doing it. But real changes are not made, the appearance of energy may give the impression that changes are being made. We had the implementation of the Broadcasting Act with Canadian ownership, which wasn’t the CRTC’s doing but was just the administrative carrying-out of an Order in Council. Then the CRTC developed the idea of a license base 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 realizes that issues are far more complicated than it had originally imagined and effectively it begins to excommunicate, and to ostracize the legislatives. At the same time the people that are being regulated do not aggressively and crudely attack the agency, as they might have done in the early days when there was a lot of insecurity. An interchange of communications takes place between the agency, its administrative staff (which becomes more and more
The idea of Canadian broadcasting as something separate, dynamic, reflecting the community and allowing Canadians to express themselves as individuals, as artists or citizens, just isn’t there.

CRTC’s very early days. They took the position that to have Canadian casting, you’ve got to make sure that was that it meant maintaining in place cause that would be destroying our powerful), and the companies that are own objectives. The trouble with that But you had another kind of being regulated. There comes to be an inappropriate kinds of licensees , particularly for English-speaking Canada .

Structural problems of television focussed on those issues and began to look to the history, the economic history of broadcasting in Canada and the production and distribution in Canada vis-a-vis American stuff . That organization 27s issue was put to the commissioners, like that , they wouldn ‘t even deal with the licenses. 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 .

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 government process as going on a major structural question like public financing versus private financing, that was one thing . But if a clear question was the fact that they did not allow for competitive applications from licensees. Not only would they not do that, they wouldn’t even deal with the issue nor give reasons why they were not allowing competitive hearings. So, at that stage, the question of television became secondary. What became primary were questions of public administration, democracy and agency integrity.

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

Local power

In western Canada, and western Canada has many political streams, the nationalist political stream in Saskatchewan and B.C. has been very strong, much more nationalist than in Ontario. One immediately began to think of more decentralized ways of doing things, because there was absolutely no way you were going to get any honest decisions from the central administration. So while still fighting these battles with the CRTC, we took an interest in more decentralized structures—one of them was subscriber ownership of cable. There are at least a few subscriber-owned cable systems in the west of a fair size—Regina, West Alford, the original one at Campbell River on Vancouver Island. And then there’s also provincial television. The more diverse structures you have, the freer the system is as a whole. But in the ‘70s, there was a tremendous paranoia about provincially underwritten television. Here things have changed and that’s one of the good things that has been happening. There is the realisation that decentralized activity is a good thing and 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

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September 1986 – Cinema Canada/29
TELEVISION: The Conservative Wave
by David Graham

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 favor 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.

The point of view. And this results in endless tension of the franchise to the massive population in western democracies, or developing itself as a democratic medium to aggregate a mass audience interested in the arts of official art. It hasn't been nearly so good at developing forms of popular culture or developing itself as a democratic medium. Now one would have thought, and I think it's a reasonable presumption, 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 exploring the issues that ordinary people are keen on.

I don't think the BBC has done this. When I was sitting at home on Friday night writing notes for this talk and watching Channel 4, I knew that I was going to keep going on but I knew that I was going to have to stop for Bill Cosby and I knew that I was going to have to stop for Cheers. And I asked myself why is it that those 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 radiant within American popular culture.

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

But there are two qualifications; one, not everything that is good is recognised. So your Hawthornes and your Emily Dickinsons achieve posthumous greatness and thank goodness they went on and did their work without an audience.

Now I think one of the good things public service broadcasting does is ensure 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 reached 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 of the American broadcasters as a carte blanche to publish what they want should have been modified by some common carrier obligations. It is pretty clear that the drive by American broadcasters in the early days of the medium to aggregate a mass audience has homogenized the output in ways that it has found difficult to leave behind. It's also pretty clear that there is a massive concentration of power at the sources of program production and that is undesirable to a liberal communications system. We should therefore try and achieve the strengths and avoid the weaknesses of the best systems around.

So what my policy for broadcasting would say is, firstly all the time we are in an age when we no longer face the scarcity of resources in the airwaves and we do not face a scarcity in the ability to achieve. In terms 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 impossible, and that you can demonstrate that the best way to achieve innovation is to give lots of individuals the chance to experiment with the future.

The U.S. has managed to create new jobs in a period of recession is an illustration of this. But the vast majority of them came from new company formations and they showed that you can demonstrate that the best way to achieve innovation is to give lots of individuals the chance to experiment with the future.

I think, therefore, our policy should take advantage of that reality, should stimulate competition because competition promotes 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 despair 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? How would you make sure that people produce efficiencies and economies within that aim? And you cannot possibly pretend that a public airwave that can only be used by people, not for profit but at the expense of the medium does not have to be apportioned – therefore a degree of regulation is necessary.

It is nonsense to pretend that everyone who talks about deregulation is in favour of some kind of bazaar where everyone tries to use the airwaves in their own way. That is not the case and it falsifies the argument if it is advanced in that way.
It is equally a fallacy to pretend that everyone who is in favour of markets is in favour of absolutely free markets; there is no such thing as a free market, every market exists within a situation that is a product of previous political decisions and every market exists within political priorities, attitudes and imperatives defined by the society within which it functions. The market is therefore an environment in which people try and satisfy demand and exchange what they have got to offer with other people.

So what would I do with British television? Here are some suggestions and they're probably quite facile and probably quite naive and I expect they can be rephrased every decade and the regulatory authority was not captured by the leaseholders.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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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.

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I can’t match David’s elegant and elaborate argument and I begin therefore with the poet Dryden: “O All, all of a piece thorough, thy chase had a beast in view, thy worlds brought nothing about but lovers were all true, ’tis well an old age is out and time to begin anew.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

On Channel 4, at the end of the news every night, a citizen, whoever he or she may be, can come forward... Some­one who wants to comment on perhaps some sort of small scale against the part of the networks.

Who is going to provide the funding for Channel 4 have. I rather doubt what he seems to be saying, ‘sweep away the old, wing in the new and we will all be happy.’

Let me say something very briefly about Channel 4. We provide a whole range of a different mix of programs and we play these programs in peak time and in accessible hours and are able to do so, are protected in doing so, by the fact that the people receive our money. It is unique, it is unlikely to be copied in any other society in the world. It is a peculiar British com­promise. It consists of letting one group of people make a fortune by giving them a monopoly in commercial televi­sion, a monopoly of television advertising unthinkable in Canada, unthinkable in the United States, and then taxing that monopoly, taxing the revenues of that monopoly to provide a very differ­ent sort of service.

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

There is one very important thing I must tell you about Channel 4 which I believe to be the reason why we are within that society. Recognises the pluralism of opinion which David and his company does for people ask me all sorts of awkward questions about balance and impartiality, but I believe it to be a vitally important role in a democratic society which recognises the pluralism of opinion within that society.

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 and care about music, people who care about all sorts of tastes that they share not necessarily with thousands of other citizens who are sympathetic with them and I believe 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 Japan’s further internationalization. News exchanges among the Asian Broadcasting Union (ABU) members along with those with broadcasters in the United States and Europe have become increasingly active year after year. 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. Uberoth, to reduce the rights for the LA Olympic games in half.

Under these circumstances, NHK is now obliged to make a thorough review of its policy of sticking to its self-reliance rate of 97 per cent in program supply, and is thinking of reducing 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 increase co-production with foreign broadcasters. But it is essential, above all, that NHK’s own financial basis be further expanded and strengthened.

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

But here again, our financial difficulties are posing a major obstacle. Satellite TV broadcasters, which NHK has until now shared the market with, are able to offer higher quality programs. They are doing so at a time when the Japanese government has decided to allow all TV programs to become commercial. The broadcasters 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-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. In the near future, NHK will be able to take advantage of the latest state-of-the-art technology for communication, and thus continue to play a major role in the development of new forms of media technology.
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 improvement with specialists before the operation but, in reality, their advice means nothing to you. Because the time has come for specialists - or professionals, as you like to call them.

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

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

Last year, we carried out a major reorganization of our news department, consolidating 12 divisions into four. This year, we will abolish the present division system in program production and instead introduce a "unit system" for individual productions. Compared to private enterprises, productivity of our staff members 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 members as possible to our subsidiary companies in the future. At the same time we can not rely on receiv ing fees alone in coping with the various developments in the new age. Any increase in our present license fees would be extremely difficult, just as a raise in public utility charges is bound to have wide-spread social repercussions. Therefore, we have been making concerted efforts to increase its secondary revenue by establishing various related enterprises under us. These new companies form the "United Stations of NHK." I mentioned before they are endeavoring to increase NHK's secondary revenue through the sales of software and various other activities. The TV documentary The Yellow River we have co-produced with China's CCTV for example, is being sold worldwide. In fact, I am the salesman for this project. When we have become able to offer a full service via the satellite broadcast we mentioned before, we plan to ask our audience to share our financial burden by paying an extra fee.

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

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

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

What's most important about this 1958 piece is that it tried to pretend as though nothing significant had happened to the broadcasting structure. The Broadcasting Act of 1958 bitterly 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 by removal of powers from the CBC, the Act effectively took the small circle out of the confines of the big one, made them about equal in size, and set them both being off in their own other but a third entity as well - an independent regulatory agency. This radical change in the Canadian broadcasting structure was unprecedented 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's profitable 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 uncompromised, structure frees them to...
follow this incentive – they simply import U.S. programs because that is cheaper and easier for 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 contribution will then more than offset the initial public subsidy. The CRTC might add up to something significant enough to prove that there is indeed a “single system.”

In fact, there is no “single system” for broadcasting in Canada. There was, at least in structure and in theory, but the 1958 Act effectively abolished it, while pretending nothing had been changed. This pretence – 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 might speak of the nervous system or the heart, 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 occasional case, there is clearly a failure in the system, when the whole is taken, 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 competitive. Unfortunately to have acknowledged the 1958 structural change would have clearly opened up a huge can of worms. No wonder the legislators that TV-2 was bound (and since) have preferred to pretend nothing had changed.

The myth of the “single system” worked extremely well for the private sector – as it may account for the refusal to acknowledge the structural change. The private broadcasters have been fostered and pampered over the years by a regulatory agency bent on their approval, since they in fact constitute the only sector that exist, and works – if only the private sector can become strong enough.

The illusionary notion of a “single system” has been continually used to justify CRTC decisions that cater to private-sector expansion.

In 1980, for instance, the CRTC allowed the merger of Canadian Cable Systems Ltd. of Toronto and Premier Communications Ltd. of Vancouver, creating a corporate cable-TV entity three times larger than any other cable firm in Canada. To those who opposed the merger, the CRTC action was illegitimate because of the dangers of concentrated media ownership, the CRTC pointed out that the Broadcasting Act spoke of a “single Canadian broadcasting system.” As a result, the CRTC dropped the proposed merger. Unfortunately to have acknowledged this in 1980. On the other hand, when the CBC wished to use that system to distribute its proposed TV-2 network via cable, the CRTC turned down the proposal on the grounds that the public service would reach only a limited audience.

More recently, the CRTC agreed to let private TV stations cooperate in producing “Canadian content” shows, with each getting full on-air credit for them. Meanwhile, the CRTC, which is clearly committed to producing quality Canadian programming, has its budgets cut in a speech to the Canadian Club on Feb. 7, 1985. CBC president Pierre Péladeau hinted that the CBC’s “hard hat” budget might add up to something significant enough to prove that there is indeed a “single system.”

The good news is that, given the will, the CBC (with its ability to cover the world) is capable of bringing public television to its full potential. We also have a new government which, with a little encouragement, could stand alone in the free world to communicate 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 we can do it. Now we can have the public broadcast discovery that we also have the financial resources, without which the will in the world is powerless; the talent and the potential of our enterprise unrealized.

The almighty dollar

The trouble is that there is money to be made by an English-speaking American way in Canada and by riding on American television’s back in Canada. That’s how English-language private broadcasters saw the reverse-rider trend as part of the American television and film system in Canada. When a controversy occurs, or a debate occurs, about, say, Canadian content, that is where the federal government and on its decision-making apparatus. The citizens as a whole aren’t involved, they are too remote from it all and there are some citizens whose re is no way to attack an American decision. 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 you think it should work out. What you do in 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 industry, but it is simply the result of the strengthening of relative economic powers in society. To pick a case in Canada, the breweries are spending $800 million on advertising 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 first priority as far as I'm concerned, and not even CBC headquarters. Again, I don't like to come back to it all the time but that's a reflection of where economic, and hence political and cultural, power is. The way the CRTC is set up gives the breweries a lobby with much more resources than the Mothers Against Drunk Driving are able to. And we are in a very mercantile age, where willy-nilly the holders of mercantile power and the others like advertising agencies are taking over more of everything, including what used to be the cultural sector. Anybody who is really interested in changing things can't change it unless he's prepared about this: they have to realise that if they're going to be critical about what's happening with television in Canada, then they are wasting their time. They can have a debate until hell freezes over, but the CBC should have more money or that public broadcasting is being abandoned, it won't do a damn bit of good. When you add to that the leverage that the breweries have over television expenditure and that god-awful, aggressive commercials on television are not only unnecessary economically but are actually offensive to a viewer trying to watch a hockey game, then they're getting to the root of the matter. And there's absolutely no reason why the breweries, to stick to that example, or why advertisers and their agencies in general, should have that power and the rest of us shouldn't have.

In some cases, legislation can be very effective. The Broadcasting Act is a positive case, but in practical terms the Act was very weak in its implementation through an agency and that's one of the great ironies. The virtue of the CRTC was it was supposed to be independent of politics. But there is very little that is specific in the Broadcasting Act – it doesn't say anything about the percentage of Canadian content that has to be used on any given program or 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 stuff can change, if it's optional, on a not required parliamentary debate and public debate. New laws of television licenses have been added without legislation, hence without affording well-researched criticism in the House of Commons or the criticism from the opposition political party that might be interested, or even the awareness of the government of the day or the Minister of Culture. In other words, 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, or failed to come to grips with, a long time ago. But in many ways, we bought our education by not really being responsive to their publics. I don't know that much about French television but my impression is that it is very highly centralized. It certainly was the case that the journalists responsible 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 is going to have any defence against being submerged by American product and against abandoning our own structures, that defence is our elected representatives and public debate and the political process.

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

End political virginity

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

Now we know what's happening and that's a step forward from the ways things were 10 years ago. We know the CRTC is a cipher that can't be depended upon. We are also getting an understanding now that television does not stand alone as an issue: it is part of a larger question of economics and political power. One thing that bothers me is that the people in the profession have always tended to stay away from talking about things in that way – you know, that's politics, that's economics, that's not us, we're in television, we're creating something in entertainment and culture – as if getting involved in the larger economic and political issue was going to contaminate them, was going to rob them of their integrity. I think that people in the trade should lose their political virginity and should dirty their hands and get involved in those larger issues. If they put their arguments for their own industry in context, they are not going to be caught with decisions already made like the CBC cutbacks – and have to cry injustice at all, 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.

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