

Moreover, in those days, Canadian stations operated on such low power that, although there were seventy-five by 1929, they reached little more than half the population. There was continual interference from powerful stations across the border. Licensing, then and now, was sometimes highly controversial and charges of political influence regularly thickened the air.

In 1929, a Royal Commission reported to Parliament its belief that broadcasting was important in the promotion of Canadian unity, and that it would be impossible for commercial revenue alone ever to finance an adequate service. It recommended the Government establish a nationally-owned broadcasting company. For the next three years of Crash and Depression, the debate bubbled along in a messy way but eventually the Government decided that if the people had to choose between "the State or the United States" they'd probably pick the State.

The Government did not immediately go the whole route to a nationally-owned company—the art of government in Canada usually precludes immediately going the whole route to anything—but it did establish a three-man authority to be known as the Canadian Radio Broadcasting Commission, and the CRBC was the beginning of public broadcasting in the country. Its job was to build new stations and take over others to develop and operate a national network. It would tolerate the survival of only those private stations that it did not need for the network. The legislation prohibited anyone from owning a private radio network in Canada.

By the spring of 1933 the CRBC had begun to assemble its own broadcasting staff and to acquire the stations operated by Canadian National Railways. It carried programs in both English and French, and symphony concerts, plays, children's programs, sports, radio variety, news and the "Northern Messenger" broadcasts to the Arctic and sub-Arctic that have continued in one form or another until today. Moreover, even in its extreme infancy the CRBC, precursor of the

*In the twenties the brave new world of sound began. It came out of ten Canadian National Railways broadcasting stations from coast to coast and it landed in observation cars like the one centre, rolling across the prairies. The unseen performers, upper left, dressed up sometimes and produced simulated sound effects from strange gadgets. Transmission involved tons of magnificent tubes. By the late thirties times were grimmer, but when King George VI came to Winnipeg in 1939, CBC rose to the occasion and furnished him with two golden microphones through which he said a few words to the Empire. By the forties it was grim indeed and Rooney Pelletier, the CBC war correspondent in London, interviewed home town boys such as Lieut. Kemp Edwards of Ottawa for the faithful listeners at home.*

CBC, began happily to assume its beloved role as the mother of performing and theatrical talent.

In these early days, the CRBC-CBC also got its first taste of an accusation that has stuck with it for all of its forty years, and may well be with it throughout the next forty as well. It is the accusation of political bias in CBC programs, and it arose during the 1935 election campaign in connection with a radio series called "Mr. Sage." "Mr. Sage" was not labelled a party production but he was cheerfully partisan nonetheless, and a committee of Parliament decided the show contained "offensive personal references." The 1936 Broadcasting Act prohibited "dramatized political broadcasts," and, nowadays, the controversy spins primarily and endlessly around the CBC's handling of television news and public affairs.

In the late thirties, the CBC carried the predictable run of music, drama, talks, news, religious broadcasts, variety shows such as "The Happy Gang," dance music "distinctively styled by the Dominion's leading experts of syncopation," and such superior U.S. fare as the Metropolitan Opera, Lux Radio Theatre, Charlie McCarthy and the World Series. It carried King Edward VIII's abdication speech, a Christmas service from Bethlehem, the third birthday party of the Dionne quintuplets and, during the Munich crisis, more than a hundred special broadcasts.

In World War II, French and English-speaking CBC engineers and correspondents made on-the-spot recordings in the London blitz, and they were the first among the wartime broadcasters to develop mobile equipment for use in the European campaigns.

AT ONE TIME OR ANOTHER the CBC has triumphed in virtually every way that a radio-television network can. Its productions in French and English have won more than their share of international awards for their educational value, for their public service, and for their artistic or professional excellence. Its science shows, its programmes on the arts, its radio news, its more lavish efforts in serious music are respected by audiences and broadcasting people in many parts of the world.

The CBC's public money—the fact that it need not constantly fight for ratings in order to survive—means that it can experiment and sometimes provide programmes specifically for people who dislike whatever happens to be massively popular. Its more vehement critics argue that this is exactly what's wrong with the CBC, that it's *too* experimental, too arty, and that its relative freedom from the taste-making pressures of advertisers enable it deeply to offend the people of Middle Canada. On the other hand, CBC programming has attracted some intensely loyal fans, not only in Canada but in the northern States as well.