

Radio and Television

this predilection. But this is one field in which it became very quickly clear, even in the twenties of this century when radio was first developing and broadcasting was first being undertaken, that there would be no distinctively Canadian content to radio broadcasting if it were left to undiluted commercial enterprise.

It was that circumstance which led the government of Mr. Mackenzie King in 1928 to appoint the Aird commission. It is very significant that the report of the Aird commission has, in its essence, been accepted by and acceptable to the great majority of Canadians and to all governments ever since. There has been one deviation from the recommendations of the Aird commission, of course, but up until now there has been only one serious deviation.

There is no doubt that at the time the recommendation was made it was contemplated—and I think it was still contemplated even at the time the Canadian Broadcasting Act was first introduced in this parliament in 1936—that there would be a state broadcasting system and nothing else, as there is in the United Kingdom. We should remember, of course, that these recommendations were made and implemented at a time when we had a population of 10 million instead of 17 million in this country and at a time when economic activity was very different from the level it had attained at the time the Fowler commission made its report which, I might remind hon. members, was before the current recession began.

It is possible to contemplate that some of the economic conditions which made it seem imperative to the Aird commission that a complete monopoly of broadcasting should be given to a state organism were found not to be present because of the growth of population, wealth and capacity to support alternatives, but as the Fowler commission pointed out there were certain unfortunate as well as many very fortunate results which flowed from the deviation from that original decision. One of them was, of course, that because the private stations were anterior at least in time to the C.B.C. and they had established certain rights—not vested rights because specifically they were excluded, but rights of use and wont—they perhaps did manage, in one or two cases, to retain certain valuable franchises which were really a part of the public domain for which the public was not given as adequate a return as the public should have got.

That has been one of the thorniest of all the problems that every government has had to face. Once we decided to deviate from the original conception of a purely state agency, once we decided that private stations regulated

by a state agency should be a part of the national system, it was quite clear that the most difficult decision—and as the hon. member for Port Arthur (Mr. Fisher) pointed out, the kind fraught with the greatest danger—would have to be made from time to time, and that was how and at what price and in what circumstances should part of the public domain be exploited by private users. It should be pointed out over and over again that the airwaves are the public domain, that they are limited and that the public has the right to control them completely. All this talk about the possibility of free enterprise and competition in this sphere is, as the Fowler commission pointed out, talking about something that is not in accord with the facts of the situation.

Whenever a private station—be it a radio station or even more a television station—is given a licence it is being given a chunk of the public domain to exploit and it seems to me it should be given that chunk of the public domain to exploit only if it is going to be exploited in the public interest. That does not mean, of course, that the people who do the exploiting are not entitled to a proper remuneration for what they do whether it be in the form of salary and wages or in the form of profits, but it does mean that the public interest should always be paramount and always be put first.

It seems to me there are three problems of major significance that face the government at the present time. I am going to state them in the order of difficulty and it so happens that I think the order of importance is the exact opposite of the order of difficulty.

I think the least important of the three, but the most difficult of the three, is to decide to whom, where and under what conditions private licences for television are to be granted.

Mr. Nowlan: That is the least important.

Mr. Pickersgill: I say that that is the least important of the three in the whole picture but I think it is the most difficult of the three and I think the most fraught with dangers of many kinds for those who have the responsibility for discharging that obligation. We all know that of all those potential franchises the most valuable one is clearly the second channel in the city of Toronto. Not only is this the largest aggregation of population in the country using one language, or predominantly one language, but it so happens that in Toronto there is only one more channel available while in Montreal there are two. I am subject to correction on this but I think there are two in Vancouver, but in any case even if there is only one in Vancouver it might potentially be much more