

Canada Weekly

Volume 8, No. 38

October 8, 1980



Ottawa, Canada

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Reshaped television broadcasting system urged by CBC president

"The time has come for basic changes in the Canadian broadcasting system. Canadian television, as a cultural expression and influence, is seriously threatened," said A.W. Johnson, president of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) in the corporation's 1979-80 report, excerpts from which follow:

...We sense a growing concern, not only in the broadcasting industry, but at the regulatory and political levels, on the part of cultural leaders and among thoughtful Canadians generally, that Canadian television must reflect Canadian life - that national identity and national pride rest as much on cultural and human factors as on economic or institutional questions.

...There is one simple test we can apply to any proposed change or addition to our broadcasting system: will it increase the production of quality Canadian programming, and will it contribute to greater viewing of Canadian programming? That is the measure we used, in the CBC, in preparing our recommendations to the Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) on service to the North, on pay television, and on satellite transmission as a whole.

Satellite service to remote areas

Television has a special importance in the Canadian North, where it must attempt to serve both the native peoples and the relative newcomers, each with their different priorities and interests. The question posed by the CRTC was how best to use satellite delivery to achieve a better balance between service in southern Canada, with the widest choice of television channels in the world, and those northern and remote communities which have no television at all or only the basic service of the CBC.

We suggested a two-stage method of getting the main national and regional services to isolated viewers. In the first stage the CBC would make use of time gaps on the two satellite channels now used for distribution of the corporation's Parliamentary coverage. During these unused periods, the CBC would provide the

North with packages of network programming supplied for this purpose by the private French and English networks, TVA and CTV.

For the second stage, we proposed that broadcasters should work together to make a package of other Canadian services, such as programs from the provincial educational networks and the private regional broadcasters, to be added to the satellite for distribution as capacity permitted....

Northern regional programming

Although national and southern programming will be welcome to many residents of the North, it is equally essential that there be a regional service to link northern communities and reflect northern lifestyles and interests....

To expand its own efforts in the North, the CBC will request funding from Parliament for a plan to increase regional television production in Yellowknife, Northwest Territories and to establish a second production centre in Whitehorse, Yukon. A major Inuit-oriented production centre is also needed, but whether it would be most useful as a CBC operation or an independent one will have to be decided. The CBC centres would produce and procure northern programs, offer job opportunities for northerners, and work closely with northern residents to determine their needs. The CBC would also encourage and assist independent native production groups and provide them with access to local CBC transmitters.

Pay television

Regarding pay TV, we have urged caution in the past and we still do. Another influx of American material, merely for entrepreneurial profit, would bring Canadian broadcasting more problems than benefits.

Nineteen years ago this week...
Eleanor Roosevelt, wife of former United States President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, officiated at the opening of Memorial University in St. John's, Newfoundland.