

And even now, forty years later, the odds are that in any official discussion of Canadian television programming "foreign" will turn out to be euphemism for "American."

Finally, in both television and radio programming, the CBC in '72 is trying to give even more network responsibility to its regional staffs, with one aim being to include more programs from all the wildly varying cultural and geographic corners of the country. This effort, like the increasingly heavy investments in Canadian content, is a return to first principles.

[PART II]

What she is. How and why she began. As a patron of musicians, writers, talkers, filmmakers, poets, and tapdancers. Her bias (it is said.)

THE BULK OF CANADIANS do not think their institutions socialistic, but their choice—in transportation, communications and culture—their choice has often been half-socialism or nothing. The people, in contrast to the miles, have been few and their sense of national destiny slight and fragmented. The federal government has often been the only source with both the money and ocean-to-ocean vision to build cohesive national organizations. Air Canada, the Canadian National Railways, the National Film Board, the Canada Council, a raft of grants, subsidies, and pot sweeteners for assorted expressions of cultural yearning are all federal government efforts to hold Canada together despite the logic of geography, climate, economics and the power of the people next door.

The CBC is the most pervasive of these. The economic odds against its becoming so were massive. Canada is forty times bigger than Great Britain but there are almost as many television sets in London as there are in our whole country. Canada is bigger than the entire USA, including Alaska, but in New York City there are more television sets than there are from Canadian coast to Canadian coast. Still an estimated 98.6 per cent of all Canadians are within reach of CBC radio, and 96.8 per cent are within reach of CBC television. The Corporation enjoys an almost total intrusion of the living rooms, kitchens, cars, workshops and cottages of Canada. It was born with a mission to build a sense of Canadian community by enabling Canadians to hear about one another and from one another; its new-found emphasis on regional programming decisions and production is a return to the obligations of forty years ago.

The early history of broadcasting in Canada has all the sad, dusty, rollicking, singing charm of the early history of radio almost everywhere. Stations began to spring up all across the coun-

try about 1922, and their owners included church groups, universities, radio manufacturers, newspapers, and just little clubs of primitive radio nuts. The CNR had its own stations and, before it established them, it had already experimented with broadcasts to moving trains. Uniformed operators tuned the receiving sets aboard the parlour cars, and it became the height of luxury to rattle across Canada to the sound of doo-whack-a-doo. CN gradually built up a little network and it offered light music, symphony, opera—all of it live—hockey, talks, school stuff, and Canadian historical drama. It imported young Tyrone Guthrie from England to produce the dramas. From the beginning, however, classic Canadian problems afflicted Canadian broadcasting. A recital of these problems of almost half a century ago sounds something like testimony before today's deliberations of the CRTC. Canadian programming suffered in the Twenties because recorded music and popular U.S. shows were both cheaper than native production. Stations were mostly in the big cities, where the money was, and service to sparsely settled parts of Canada barely existed. It cost a lot to broadcast across 4,500 miles to a scattered population and, therefore, national programming was weak. 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 national 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.