

The Great Canadian Network



Canada Today/d'aujourd'hui

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Perhaps nothing is as Canadian as the CBC, or Radio-Canada, as it's known in French.

It is a mother of invention and a child of circumstances. It wins awards, at home and abroad, inspires some Canadians and outrages others. It is always in a crisis, usually a fiscal one, often a cultural one, and today's admirer may be tomorrow's critic, but down deep, almost all Canadians take a proprietary pride in its accomplishments. As Warner Troyer wrote in *The Sound and the Fury*, the people at CBC, despite relatively small budgets, often "outrun those in other nations... both technically and creatively."

The current crisis is technological – how will it adjust to the new world of satellites, pay-TV and direct, producer-to-home broadcasting?

In this issue of *Canada Today/d'aujourd'hui* we look at Canada's first network as it was, as it is and as it is about to be.

CBC Then and Now

Canada's first scheduled radio waves – now sixty-five light years out in space – were broadcast by XWA in Montreal, the first station in North America. By 1924 the Canadian National Railway was sending music to parlor car passengers rolling across the country, and by 1928 the CNRV Players were presenting Othello with sound effects. Still, there were a few clouds on the southern horizon.

By the late 1920s Canada had scores of weak and scattered stations that reached less than half the population. Powerful U.S. and Mexican stations, some 50,000 watts, were flooding the country and the American ones, rich in advertising revenues, were producing elaborate and expensive entertainments.

The problem was easily defined – it was important to Canadians, both French- and English-speaking, that they have the daily opportunity to hear their own artists in works that reflected their own cultures.

In 1929 a Royal Commission, chaired by Sir John Aird, president of the Canadian Bank of Commerce, recommended



that Canada create its own publicly-owned, coast-to-coast radio company.

It did and the Canadian Radio Broadcasting Commission, the CRBC, which was to be financed by \$2 annual fees paid by owners of sets, began with six stations (including CNR facilities) in the East. It offered programs of Canadian content (a phrase that would become fixed in the nation's vocabulary), in English and French, and in four years it was broadcasting six hours a day over its own eight stations and eighteen affiliated ones.

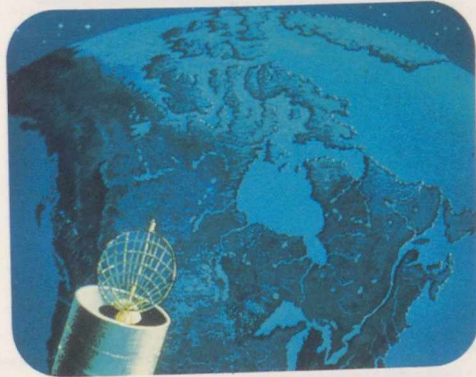
This was not good enough. In 1936 Parliament replaced the CRBC by the CBC, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, a Crown corporation destined to "safeguard, enrich and strengthen the cultural, political, social and economic fabric of Canada."

It was a difficult mission (two years ago another commission pointed out that these basic goals were "vague . . . largely unmeasurable . . . and inconsistent"), but CBC would fulfill its basic challenge – to serve all Canadians – with impressive speed.

CBC now owns and operates twenty-nine originating television stations and 545 transmitters, and it reaches over 99 per cent of the population. It has radio and television networks in English and French and thirty-two affiliated television stations. Its Northern Service and



Canadian National



Telestar Canada



Northern Quebec Service play to an audience of 80,000 scattered across the northern reaches of six provinces, the Yukon, the Northwest Territories and the High Arctic Archipelago. Local and network radio offer northerners shows in English, French, Inuktitut, Western Inuvialookton, Coppermine, Slavey, Dogrib, Cree, Chipewyan, Hareskin and Loucheux, and there is a full TV service in English, as well as special programs in the native languages bounced off the Anik satellite. CBC's Radio Canada International sends short-wave broadcasts in eleven languages to 10 million listeners a week, one million in the U.S. alone.

CBC tries to make certain that Canadian cultural products are always accessible and that both English- and French-speakers feel at home anywhere in Canada – a French-speaker in Calgary can watch dramas and hear the news of the world, the country and the regions in French; and an English-speaker can tune programs in Trois-Rivières.

A complete program schedule of short-wave broadcasts is available by writing:
Radio Canada International
 P.O. Box 6000
 Montreal, Canada H3C 3A8

Programming

Radio

In 1933 CRBC radio featured a novelty mandolin orchestra of six siblings led by a fifteen-year-old. It proved to be neither a cultural low nor a cultural high.

In 1936 it broadcast live bulletins every fifteen minutes from an impromptu studio in a parked car at the scene of a mine cave-in at Moose River, Nova Scotia.

They were carried in full by every station in Canada and in part by some 650 in the United States.

In the 1930s and '40s CBC radio became the nourishing mother of Canada's performing arts. It fostered the careers of practically every notable actor, musician and playwright in the country – Lorne Greene, Christopher Plummer, Richard Tucker, Glenn Gould and



Maureen Forrester, to name a few of the most luminous. It trained and polished thousands of singers, comedians, commentators, pundits and musicians. Many would move south in time, to write, direct and act in U.S. network shows and Hollywood movies; but all of them, and millions of other Canadians, would keep a special affection for the Mother at home.

From the start CBC lacked the fiscal resources of its southern rivals, but it could occasionally substitute dash for money, and it often took productive advantage of the flexibility that comes with intimate organization. It broadcast a Christmas service from Bethlehem and the third birthday party of the Dionne quintuplets from Callander, Ontario; King Edward VIII's abdication speech; and, during the Munich crisis in 1939, it

carried more than a hundred news broadcasts in seventeen days. During World War II CBC correspondents were among the first to have mobile equipment and, therefore, among the first to broadcast the evocative sounds of blitz and battle.

At home CBC Stage was cited as the "best repertory group in this hemisphere" by *The New York Times*, and Igor Stravinsky called the CBC Symphony "brilliant."

As radio lost much of its round-the-clock audience to the emerging TV, the job got tougher. By the 1960s CBC was playing the same pop music as an enormous number of private radio stations. In 1974 it said goodbye to all that, dropped advertising and top 40 programs on both its AM and FM networks and focused on distinctive programming. There were happy results. Today CBC Radio offers many kinds of entertainment for many kinds of people. It is the main source of radio dramas, serious music, children's shows, public affairs, science, and literary and arts coverage, in addition to its first-rate coverage of the news. The CBC share of the English AM audience rose 50 per cent between 1973 and 1980. In the Toronto and Vancouver metropolitan areas, the increases were 100 and 133 per cent, and in Montreal 20 per cent.

Television

CBC Television began a limited microwave service in 1952 and found itself engaged in an immediate competition with the high-cost products of ABC, CBS and NBC.

It did not do too badly, particularly in Quebec, where for the first time viewers could see a full sweep of programs in French. That first year the French TV network delighted enfants with "Pépinot et Capucine," and grown-ups with the live presentation of the hockey game in which Maurice "Rocket" Richard of the Canadiens scored his 325th goal. The English side offered "The Big Revue," full-hour musicals with sketches and production numbers, all live, with the orchestra jammed into one corner of the studio. It also covered news and offered "Fighting Words," a discussion program that was both live and lively.

"Les Plouffe," a slice of family life in Quebec City, became the big hit of both networks. It would last six years and then be reproduced again as a film and TV mini-series in 1981. The hardest English-



language perennial, the comedy team of Wayne and Shuster, came in 1954 and delighted audiences at home and, through frequent appearances on the "Ed Sullivan Show," abroad. It is still going strong. René Lévesque, the founder of the Parti Québécois and the present Premier of Quebec, was immensely popular as the principal of "Point de Mire," a news commentary which, in his words, "attracted not just the experts who sometimes criticized the show but the taxi drivers and the guy on the street. It was the soap opera of current affairs."

By 1958 CBC-TV was covering Canada coast-to-coast, a triumph with built-in difficulties. The competition from the American networks had been formidable from the start, but in the earliest days audiences were relatively small on both sides of the border and production costs relatively modest. As the American audiences grew enormously, American networks set a new and extravagant pace. Canadian set owners tuned in. When colour came to CBC in 1966, costs took another great leap.

CBC continued to emphasize Canadian programming, but the competition, first the American networks and later the privately owned CTV, grew more formidable. To maintain its share of the national audience, it bought and broadcast the most popular American shows – it could buy one for one-tenth of the cost of producing a comparable program of its own – and concentrated its own production efforts on drama and music, with some world-class results. "Louis Riel," an opera concerning the leader of the Métis rebellions of 1870 and 1885, was hailed as "an event of the first magnitude in the history of Canadian music"; and "The National Dream," the story of the building of the Canadian Pacific, was a success with both critics and viewers. "The Whiteoaks of Jalna," by CBC's own reckoning, "the most ambitious single project ever undertaken by its drama department," was not. It was a blockbuster only in the sense that it bombed for thirteen successive weeks. Harry Bruce wrote that it could at least "be regarded as a force for national unity" since "it gave Canadians something they could all talk about."

The competition in news programs has been less formidable. The American networks do not deliver detailed news about Canada, and Canadians watch home-grown news, commentary and public

affairs programs in overwhelming numbers. CTV attracts its share but CBC often shines. Its "This Hour Has Seven Days," "the fifth estate" and "The Journal," for example, have won international acclaim.

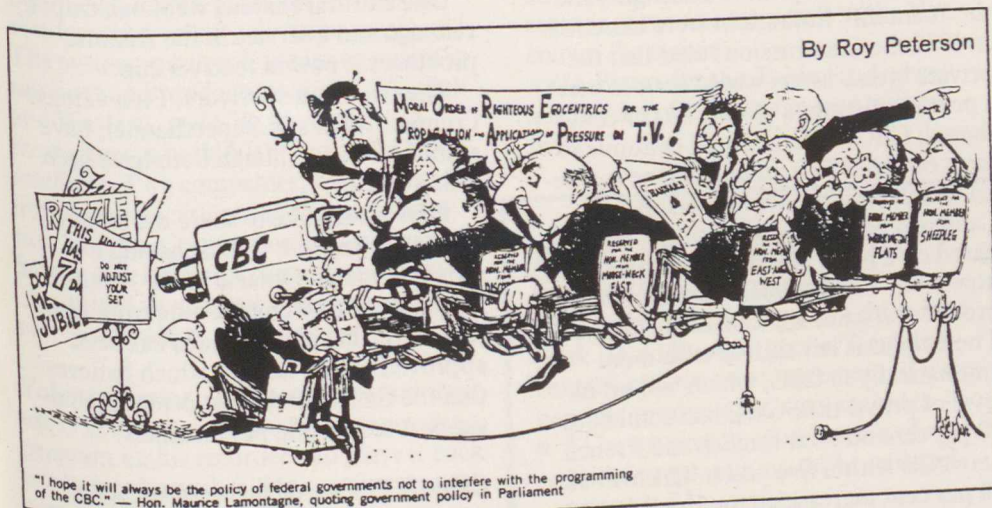
Ratings for the current prime-time hour "The National," news, followed by "The Journal," analysis and comment, have exceeded expectations. They regularly attract audiences of 1.9 million and 1.6 million respectively. Documentaries from "The Journal," which varies satellite and studio interviews with full-length documentary features and analysis, are shown frequently in the United States on PBS's "MacNeil-Lehrer Newshour."

Awards

CBC/Radio-Canada drama, documentary and variety programs have won three Academy Awards in a row, six international Emmys in eight years and two Golden Rose of Montreux awards. The Oscar winners were "Boys and Girls," which won for live action short this year; "Just Another Missing Kid" (from "the fifth estate" series), which won for documentary feature in 1983; and "Crac," which won as best animated short in 1982. International Emmys were awarded for "Henry Ford's America" in 1977; "Four Women," 1978; "Rich Little's Christmas Carol," 1979 (which also won a Golden Rose of Montreux); "Fighting Back" and "L'oiseau de feu," 1980. "Fraggle Rock," a children's program



produced by CBC with Henson Associates, creator of the muppets, also won an international Emmy in 1983. "Dream Weaver," an ice show with Toller Cranston, won a Golden Rose of Montreux in 1980.



By Roy Peterson

"I hope it will always be the policy of federal governments not to interfere with the programming of the CBC." — Hon. Maurice Lamontagne, quoting government policy in Parliament

Critics

CBC has never been without critics and they have often been members of Parliament.

Vulgarity — or what was perceived as vulgarity or something worse — has stirred a number of MPs. Indeed, there were complaints in the seventies that CBC attacked the "very fabric of our Western way of life."

"The thing about Eve," one Member thundered, "was that she was faced with the same subtle temptation which is now being offered to the young people of this country from many sources, and the CBC is assisting in presenting this temptation through the medium of television."

CBC also has its staunch defenders, in Parliament and out, and over the years they have prevailed, as on one occasion

when the Cabinet Minister responsible for the Corporation interrupted one angry colleague who had railed at length about the burden on the taxpayers.

"If I cannot do anything else to bring the Honourable Member to the point, I have taken the precaution of putting in this envelope the sum of \$5.48, which is the per capita cost of CBC radio and television for every man, woman and child in Canada. If the Honourable Member will undertake neither to listen to nor to watch CBC radio or television for a year from this date, and to shut up about it, I will be glad to send him the money."

The defenders have been as determined as the attackers, and, in response to both, CBC has maintained a high level of independence.

Seeing Things

"Seeing Things," which has been called "the best series in the history of Canadian television," is also the first to be widely sold abroad. It is now being shown in England, Australia and on PBS in the United States.

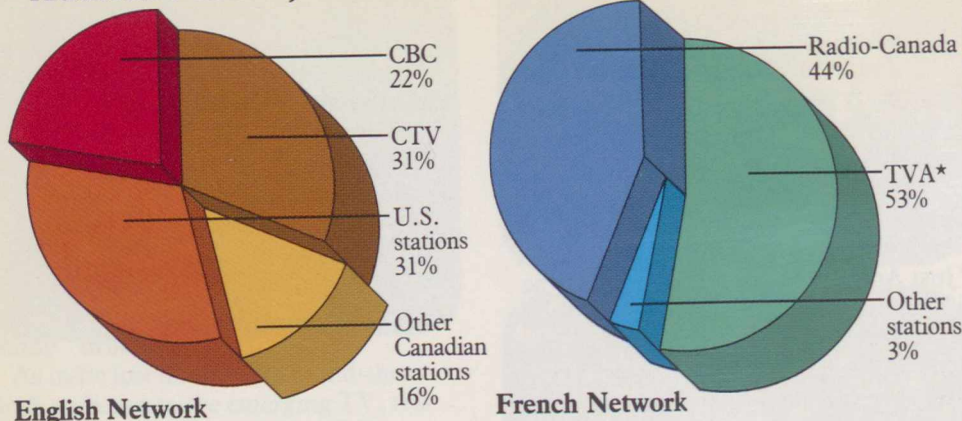
The show, produced, and written by Louis Del Grande, who also stars in it, is a kind of mystic mystery, centred on the adventures of a plump, harried Toronto newspaperman who has visions at the scenes of crimes which lead in time to solutions.

The series has drawn an average of 1.1 million viewers, 14 per cent of the Canadian audience.



© Roy Peterson Ink, Inc.

Audience Share, 1982-1983



Source: CBC

* Privately owned network with ten French stations.

Canadian Content

Canadian broadcasting, as noted, has always suffered from a border-line disease – the overwhelming availability of popular and expensively produced programs from the United States.

In 1960 the Board of Broadcast Governors, the regulators of the Canadian airwaves, ruled that within two years 55 per cent of all broadcast time must be “Canadian in content and character.”

The Board’s definition of Canadian content was broad – it included not only programs actually produced in Canada but all news and commentary programs, events in which Canadians were participating, and special programs such as the World Series and the funerals of Winston Churchill and John Kennedy that were “of interest to Canadians.”

In 1962, when the rule went into effect, it was extended to include CTV, Canada’s first privately owned TV network, and tightened a bit. Prime-time programs would include those shown between 6:00 p.m. and midnight and they, as well as the overall averages, would have to score the 55 per cent. This was soon relaxed; CTV’s prime-time quota for fall, winter and spring was lowered to 40 per cent and no prime-time quota was applied in the summer.

In 1968 the Canadian Radio-Television Commission (now the Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission) replaced the Board, and in 1970 it narrowed the sweep of what was considered “Canadian” and hiked the quotas for both CBC and the private stations to 60 per cent for both average and prime time. Prime time was shortened to 6:30 to 11:30 p.m., which added to the Canadian content concentration.

In 1971 the CRTC refined its terms once more. Prime time was extended again, from 6:00 p.m. to midnight, and the “content” limitations were loosened. In 1972 the Commission ruled that the private broadcasters would have to meet a prime-time quota of only 50 per cent, though CBC stations would continue to meet 60. In 1983 it announced new criteria which became effective last April. Canadian content certification is now based on a point system which considers how many key members of the cast and production team are Canadian citizens. The emphasis has shifted even more emphatically to CBC, which will lift its level of prime-time Canadian content to 80 per cent on both English and French networks within five years. This will be a 40 per cent increase on the English network and 20 per cent on the French.

“The requirement that the broadcasting service should be basically Canadian in content and character is not an attempt to exploit nationalism for the benefit of Canadian artists, writers, performers and producers. Its purpose is to recognize that Canadians have ideas to express.”

Fowler Commission, 1957

New Challenges

CBC – which has survived the high-level competition from below the border and from privately owned Canadian rivals, the very popular CTV and the less pervasive Global TV – is now facing a wide range of new challenges.

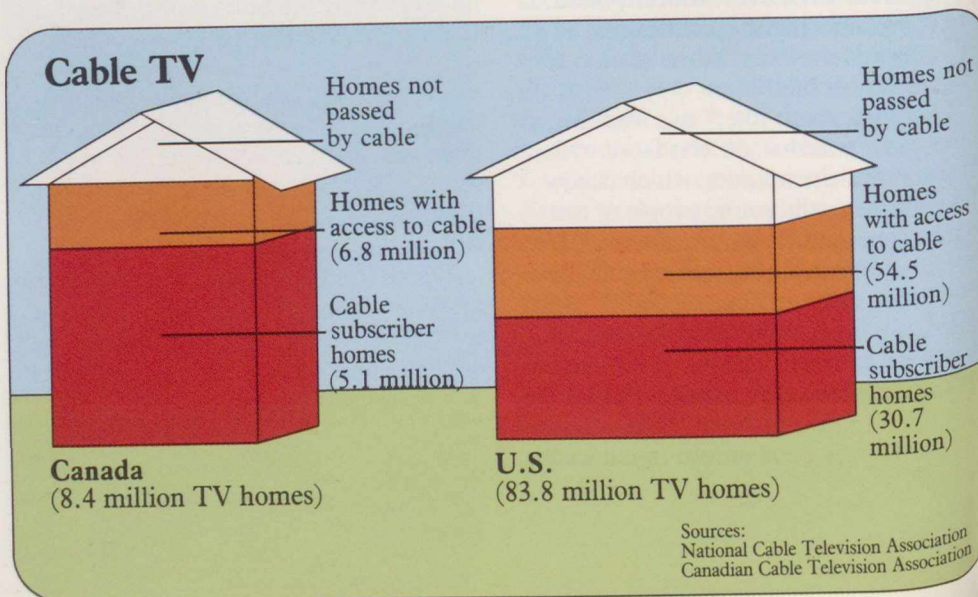
Pay-TV: In 1982 the CRTC authorized several regional and specialized pay-TV services, and production began in February 1983.

One cultural channel went bankrupt a year ago and a service in the Atlantic provinces is now in receivership.

The two main survivors, First Choice/Premier Choix and Superchannel, have ambitious plans though both have been losing money.

They would like to share the national market, with First Choice having a monopoly from Ontario to the Atlantic Ocean and Superchannel one from Manitoba to the Pacific. The idea has been approved by the CRTC, which believes that the Canadian market is too small to support competing pay channels.

Cable TV: Canada is the most cabled country in the world, with some 4.9 million subscribers, 60.9 per cent of its homes, connected, and the services are expanding. Most Canadians have access to more channels than do viewers in New York – in addition to the CBC French and English networks, and the private



Sources:
National Cable Television Association
Canadian Cable Television Association

Canadian ones, CTV and Global, they also have access to local American stations near the border and through them and cable to NBC, CBS, ABC and PBS. Cable companies will soon offer scores more, including all-sports and all-news services.

Satellites/DBS: Direct Broadcasting Systems will bounce programs off satellites to earth stations in viewers' own backyards (or possibly apartment house windows). There are 1.7 million Canadian households which now receive only one or two television channels and would presumably welcome more.

The first receiver models, which measure some eleven square metres, can pick up more than eighty channels from satellites. Future dishes will be smaller, one metre in diameter in six years, and will cost less than colour television receivers. The system requires huge investments in satellites and production, and RCA, Gulf and Western, and CBS have dropped their plans to build high-powered DBS satellites. Two companies, United Satellite Communications, and Communication Satellite Corporation's subsidiary, Satellite Television Corporation, are still committed though not planning high-powered projects anytime soon.

Videocassettes: These are here and their use is growing. The set owner tapes any program on his recorder and plays it back as often as he wishes. He can also rent or buy a wide variety. When he has accumulated enough old favourite movies, concerts and plays, he can ignore most of the daily offerings, including advertisements. Experts believe 25 per cent of Canadian homes with TV will have videocassette equipment by 1990.



Content Ahead

Highlights of the CBC schedule this fall include:

"Backstretch": A series set in rural Ontario's harness racing circuit.

"Danger Bay": A series based on the adventures of Grant "Doc" Roberts, the curator of marine mammals at the Vancouver Aquarium.

"A Planet for the Taking": A geneticist's view of man and nature in eight parts.

"The Other Kingdom": A two-part drama of a journalist's struggle with cancer.

"Hockey Night": a family special about a female goalie on a boy's hockey team.

"The Boy Next Door": A one-hour drama that deals with the conflict between an attractive widow and her troubled nineteen-year-old son.

"Iolanthe" with Maureen Forrester and "Tartuffe" with Brian Bedford: Telecasts of the Stratford Festival's productions.

"The Tin Flute": Mini-series based on the novel by Gabrielle Roy about love and poverty in Montreal in the 1940s.

Last season, for the first time, the CBC English network broadcast a program in French, "Duplessis," a drama about the long-time Premier of Quebec, that was subtitled one night and dubbed another. Surveys showed that viewers preferred the dubbed version. The experiment was successful and the network plans to air more programs in French.

Now, an Added Word from the Sponsor

CBC's plans are detailed in a thick blue book. In addition to greater Canadian content and the encouragement of independent productions, they include:

- "The maximum contribution of regional programming to the national network."
- "A second television service to provide greater Canadian choice." The service, which will be designed to appeal to particular audiences in the manner of the BBC, would begin modestly, with a weekend service.

- "Co-operation between CBC's English and French TV Services." The two services will increase the number of co-productions, also involving independent Canadian and international producers. Expanded use of subtitles is planned.

- A "further extension of coverage... by satellites."

CBC will not drop advertising as has been suggested by some critics, but it will attempt to reduce commercial interruptions "in certain kinds of programs." Advertising income was \$154.2 million last year, or about 18 per cent of the total revenues.

The Revolution in Progress

In the course of a tumultuous life CBC has been examined by at least thirty-six government commissions. The most recent, the Federal Cultural Policy Review Committee, chaired by composer Louis Applebaum and writer Jacques Hébert, which filed its final report in November 1982, concluded that the developing DBS satellite technology will greatly diminish the CRTC's ability to regulate broadcasting. The report said, "It is sobering to contemplate what the

impact will be when a host of U.S. services can be received anywhere in Canada."

Francis Fox, former minister of communications, called the technological revolution "the pre-eminent cultural problem of the decade."

Canada already has between 9,000 and 10,000 receiving stations in use, and Canadian Satellite Communications Inc. sends TV and radio signals to remote parts of the country. Last March the government relaxed the rules to allow individuals and hotels free and unlicensed use of satellite earth receiving dishes.

CBC is responding. It has committed itself to increased use of independent productions. A federal Program Development Fund of up to \$115 million will provide one-third of the production costs, the producer another third and CBC (or another Canadian network) the rest. The network will hold the Canadian rights, but the producer will retain the world rights.

When its television services become fully Canadianized, 50 per cent of all network programs, other than news, information and sports, will come from the private sector.

Public Broadcasting Here and There

Public broadcasting in the U.S. differs substantially from broadcasting in Canada, though they have points in common.

National Public Radio, like CBC Radio, provides programs not usually offered by commercial stations – classical and other music, public affairs, plays and children's programs.

The Public Broadcasting Service, like CBC-TV, puts an emphasis on in-depth news reporting, documentaries and high quality drama. Both NPR and PBS often carry CBC programs. Unlike CBC, PBS produces no programs and owns no stations.

Both the American and Canadian systems receive revenue from both government and private sources, but the ratios and mechanics are quite different. Last year the U.S. Congress appropriated \$137 million for both TV and radio. Individual stations also receive substantial production grants from private corporations and raise a large part of their operating expenses through contributions from listeners, including Canadians in border areas. In 1983-84 CBC received \$738.9 million directly from the government, most of the rest of its budget from advertisers and a lesser amount from program sales abroad.

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As It Happens

"As It Happens," a CBC Radio highlight since 1968, is now heard on thirty-one public radio stations in the U.S., including ones in Los Angeles, San Francisco, Washington, D.C., and New York.

The hosts, Elizabeth Gray and Alan Maitland, offer daily telephone interviews with newsmakers and commentators in Canada and around the world.

Among its triumphs have been conversations with Lech Walesa, Polish Solid-

arity leader, at home, and an eyewitness describing the assassination of Anwar Sadat.

Adrian Waller called it "powerful" and "timely" in the *Reader's Digest*, and when WNYC in New York City announced that it intended to drop the program, a wave of listener protests persuaded it to change its mind.

Another popular CBC radio magazine program, "Sunday Morning," is carried by thirty-four U.S. public stations.



"As It Happens" may be heard on the following public radio stations in the U.S.:

State	City	Station							
California	Los Angeles	KUSC	FM	91.5	New York	Albany	WAMC	FM	90.3
	San Francisco	KALW	FM	91.7		Buffalo	WBFO	FM	88.7
	San Mateo	KCSM	FM	91.1		New York	WNYC	AM	830
DC	Washington	WAMU	FM	88.5	Oswego	WRVO	FM	89.9	
					Rochester	WXXI	AM	1370	
Idaho	Rexburg	KRIC	FM	100.5	Ohio	Athens	WOUB	AM	1340
Illinois	Urbana	WILL	AM	580	Oregon	Portland	KBPS	AM	1450
	Macomb	WIUM	FM	91.3	Pennsylvania	Erie	WQLN	FM	91.3
Indiana	Indianapolis	WIAN	FM	90.1	South Dakota	Aberdeen	KDSD	FM	90.9
						Brookings	KESD	FM	88.3
Iowa	Ames	WOI	FM	90.1	Pierre/Reliance	KTSD	FM	91.1	
	Iowa City	WSUI	AM	640	Rapid City	KBHE	FM	89.3	
Kentucky	Lexington	WBKY	FM	91.3	Vermillion	KUSD	FM	89.9	
	Louisville	WFPL	FM	89.3			AM	690	
Minnesota	St. Paul/Mpls.	KSJN	AM	1330	Washington	Seattle	KUOW	FM	94.9
						Pullman	KWSU	AM	1250
Nebraska	Omaha	KIOS	FM	91.5	Tacoma/Seattle	KPLU	FM	88.5	
					Wisconsin	Hayward	WOJB	FM	88.9

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