GRANT THE CBC A BILLION DOLLARS ANNUALLY BY 1980 - GRAHAM SPRY

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On February 19, 1974, a delegation of Directors of the CBL appeared before the CRTC in support of the League's brief concerning the relicensing of the CBC networks. Prepared largely by Graham Spry, Chairman of the CBL's Policy Committee, the 127 page brief examined the problems which have faced the Corporation since its inception and made recommendations for improvement in its structure and service.

The text of the League's oral presentation, which was followed by 90 minutes of questioning by the Commission, appears below.

Pierre Juneau:

'Before you, gentlemen, I would like to pay homage to yourself, Mr. Rainiberry, as the new chairman of the Canadian Broadcasting League and as one of the important artisans, artists and administrators in a very important field, namely children's programming in Canada. The Commission, of course, very pleased that the Broadcasting League, which has such an important history in this country, has you as its new chairman.'

'I am sure that all the members of the League will agree with me that I should also use this occasion to express the League's gratitude to you for your generous and always welcome kindness I accept this. I am the essential CBL like.

'But I would draw your attention to your other remarks, in the light of that high significance, Canadian broadcasting', you said in Toronto, 'at this moment, in the opinion of the

hastening to say that if this cancer is not cured, it will destroy the system.' Indeed, your remarks in Toronto went further and concluded that the added contradictions will make the system unworkable. If we cannot maintain and develop a broadcasting system, Canada - and these are your words, sir - 'may remain some kind of trading mechanism, but I doubt it will remain a country'.

Harold Innis said the same sort of thing twenty years ago. 'Mechanization', he said in one of his profoundly thoughtful studies of communications, 'demands uniformity... The jacks of communications and the pernicious influence of American advertising in all the ramifications of Canadian life mean we are indeed fighting for our lives'.

'I could quote the same sort of thing from Dr. Norbert Wiener, the great thinker and cybreneticist. 'Properly speaking', he said, 'the community extends only as far as there extends an effective transmission of information. It is possible to give a sort of measure...by comparing the number of decisions entering a group from outside with the number of decisions made in the group. We can thus measure the autonomy of the group.'

What, sir, is the measure of the decisions or the information that influenced the decisions taken by the Canadian group from within the group, compared with the decisions and influences that pour in upon us from outside of Canada? I hate this word 'survival' and was glad to hear it last argument about it yesterday. We are not thinking of survival. We are thinking of creativeness of progress, of expansion. Yet, if we go on as we have been, where is the freedom of Canadian public opinion? Where is the measurement of these decisions we take ourselves or which are taken for us elsewhere?

'You spoke, sir, of illness, of an emerging technological cancer. Do we blame somebody else for this? When I heard of the problems of northern programming, I could not help but ask who is responsible for this. When I hear complaints about the lack of Canadian programming in prime time, I think of the position of affiliates who would be deprived of advertising. I think of the CBC in its struggle to do enormous things with limited revenues.

'Forty years ago the principles of Canadian broadcasting and a national strategy about communications were legislated by a unanimous House of Commons. Every Parliament since then has endorsed them. They were endorsed by Parliament and defined by law, but Government after Government has failed to provide the means, and for forty-two years or more we have devoted too many of our efforts to weakening those principles and compromising that national strategy.

'If the cells of Canadian broadcasting now run wild and are producing a technological cancer, the disease has its origin in our own weakness, in the compromises and inadvertences of Government in its conflict between high national interest and private business operations. The League's brief to this Commission dwells upon this theme of Governments' compromising Parliamentary policy or offering no policy at all.'

'May I give two or three examples. Canada, in 1919-20, pioneered one of the first radio stations in the world. That is, we had, at its very inception, the happy opportunity of a national policy and a national service, ideally fitted to serve a people scattered over the second largest sovereignty in the world. But no policy was formulated, except that for technical inspection. There was no vision. The development was left to local, sporadic, incomplete and ill-financed efforts by private individuals with occasional provincial intervention.'
1919 to 1938 we had the wide-open opportunity and we didn't seize it; we have not yet seized it. This delay of 17 years represents one of the most inexplicable failures of governmental imagination or understanding in Canadian history. But even when the policy was adopted, it was only adopted by half-measures; dollars paid by the listeners, not as taxpayers but as listeners, for their own sets, not by the government but by the audience, were taken away from this fund to help other Government operations.

"Television policy is the second example. Thanks to the existence of the CRTC it was introduced fairly quickly. After an initial period, the aerial gateways were thrown open to private investors and public stations and, aided by CBC's free programmes and CBC networking, in a few years the private stations became twice, now thrice, as numerous as the CBC stations. The public sector was left to carry the main load of Canadian Broadcasting and the total load of networking.

"A third example is, of course, cable. It has a similar history: it is the origin of the major problem we are facing today. Cable appeared about 1952. Not long after, the CBC sought to ensure into its role, but the Government stopped the enquiry on the grounds (I hope no provinces are listening) that cable was not 'broadcasting'. The Fowler Committee wished to include cable in its report but the subject, though suggested, was not covered in the order-in-council. As a result, we now have almost 400 cable systems - there may be more - importing programmes and operating, in effect, as unofficial affiliates or rebroadcasters of American networks and stations. Of course, we want cable, but this failure of Government imagination and action ten or twenty years ago, created the problem all the on-air stations face today and has made impossible the efforts of the CRTC adequately to resolve that problem.

"Over all these years, each opportunity we have failed to seize, we have failed to use. And if, as you fear, Mr. Chairman, the Canadian broadcasting system can perhaps not be maintained and developed, and Canada becomes some kind of 'trading mechanism' but ceases to be a country, the responsibility will not be laid on your shoulders. It will rest with Government, the lack of support of Government, with the failure of Governments to follow out the statutory policies laid down by Parliament.

"Let us get back to the principle that Parliament laid down. This is not an attack on private business, Canadian or American, nor is it by implication a profession of some immoderate faith in Government. Both those institutions, with scarcely a murmur from the Canadian people or their political parties, have been mainly responsible for the problems that CRTC and the CBC have to face. They have shared in creating this commercial environment which, by implication, you criticize in the statement I initially quoted.

"The policy of Parliament has successively been frustrated. All these statements, Mr. Chairman, are relevant to this hearing and to the renewal - which we hope will be prompt and without condition - of the CBC license. The CBC does not operate in a vacuum. It has been shaped by weak Government policy and external influences and interference - tinkering with this or that detail, revising yesterday's objectives tomorrow, trying now American Management Association and then Planning, Programming, Budgeting Systems - centralization in 1959, today's regionalism - now coercing administrators, now cheering up neglected producers. These have a meaning, but what little help they have been. They are all shadow-boxing, shadow-boxing with the problem, the problem of the goggle-box.

"No half measures will any longer do. Of a celebrated Canadian leader, Frank Scott in one of his many guises - at this moment of a poet - wrote:

"We have no shape
Because he never took sides,
And no sides
Because he never allowed them to take shape.
Do nothing by halves
Which can be done by quarters.'

"We have scarcely done them by quarters. Somewhere between 15 and 20 percent of the on the-air stations in Canada today are CBC owners and operated. The rest are private, commercial stations serving their purposes, making their money, using their tin cans for printing money. Where is all this extension of service which has been demanded and which is written into the Act? We have not even done things by quarters in effecting and realizing the national policy.

"I am going to conclude."

Pierre Juneau.

"You're not anywhere near your time limit, Dr. Spry."

Graham Spry:

"I am always glad to be ahead of my time.

"The submission the League filed with the Commission ended with a number of suggestions. Even my rush to conclude does not leave this crowded agenda time to repeat the suggestions, and they are just part of those that are in the League file. But I recall your quoting George Ferguson, that all Canadian policies of great moment were bound to be risky and to be costly. I am going to conclude, then, on behalf of the League, with only two observations.

"The whole broadcasting system needs strengthening, and its programming improved, in both the public and the private sectors, in order better to fulfill the strategy and serve Canadian objectives laid down by Parliament. In particular, the renewal of the CBC license should be followed by measures to restore the stature of this primary national service in the total system. CSC programming is the first consideration: yet, I welcomed your comment this morning, Mr. Chairman, slightly revising Mr. Fowler's reference to housekeeping. Of course, both the hardware and software are necessary, and we, as a League, would like to see - and it is in our suggestions - the owned and operated networks of the CBC rounded out and largely completed."

"But this brings us, as all these things bring us, to money. Programming is, indeed, the result and the first consideration. But the funds have been persistently inadequate and, owing to inflation, will provide less, rather than more, future programme production by the CBC at present levels of income. The League does not have sufficiently accurate knowledge to estimate with assurance the cost of CBC programming, say by 1980, nor are we going to define at this moment just what that programming should embrace. Nevertheless, without any apology whatever, our submission suggests:

"One, that the programming of the national service be more generously and adequately financed, preferably by some contemporary method of fund collection, directly from the audience rather than through taxation or advertising. The curse of the CBC is that it is between two of its most interfering opponents (also its champions): first of all, advertising, secondly, government. Surely we can look forward to some structure of public broadcasting which is not dependent to the extent that it is now, yet is responsible to Parliament. The concept is worked out in various northern countries. We need to get back to the CBC not being surrounded and hemmed in that encirclement which Mr. Picard showed us yesterday.

"The second point: to the end that there shall be better programming and better service generally, we must proceed by stages to set aside, by 1980 and in 1980 dollars, one hundred and twentieth of the gross national product, to be related to CBC programming. This 5/6 of one percent of the GNP would provide of the order of one billion dollars. That is my punch line, sir. Thank you."

Pierre Juneau.

"It does have some impact. Thank you, Dr. Spry."