



THE CBC AND CANADIANISM

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by

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On the last day of 1975 Dennis Braithwaite, a columnist for the Toronto Star, ended his column with the comment "The prize for anyone able to remember the name of the new President of the CBC remained unclaimed." I am here to introduce myself - and to claim Dennis Braithwaite's prize. It is true, I must concede, that I did take a self-imposed vow of silence when I assumed the presidency of the CBC on August 1st last year. It seemed to me then, and indeed still does, that it would be sensible for me to spend at least nine months in the CBC before making any pronouncements on the general directions in which I hoped the Corporation might go. However, the gestation period has now passed, and I welcome this opportunity of speaking about the present and the future of the CBC.

I can't think of a better forum for doing so than the Canadian Club of Toronto. After all the Canadian Club and the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation share the same essential objective: the preservation and enrichment of Canadianism.

I want to say something about this today - something about the purpose of the CBC and its historic position. More specifically, I want to say something about the power and the potential of the broadcasting media, and about the changed and the changing position of the CBC within it. I want to talk about the challenge which today confronts the CBC, and about the goal I believe we in the Corporation should set for ourselves. And I want to say something about how I believe we should set about trying to achieve this goal.

THE CBC'S PURPOSE AND ITS HISTORIC POSITION

To me, the purpose of the CBC is simple and clear, as I have suggested - the preservation and enrichment of Canadianism. Parliament has said this in straight-forward terms, in giving the CBC its mandate: the CBC exists to "safeguard, enrich and strengthen the cultural, political, social and economic fabric of Canada ... and to contribute to the development of national unity and provide for a continuing expression of Canadian identity". We are told we are to achieve this goal by

providing "a balanced service of information, enlightenment and entertainment ... extended to all parts of Canada ... in English and French ... (and by) actively contributing to the flow and exchange of cultural and regional information and entertainment".

I suppose each of us could express his or her own view about the CBC's purpose - and its historic position - in rather more personal terms. As for myself, I remember well as a boy and as a young man in Saskatchewan, that in a very real sense CBC was Canada. Without it Canada, for me, would have been Saskatchewan and the people in the largely rural environment where I was raised. It was the CBC - not only the CBC, of course, but so much the CBC - which enlarged my country for me; reflected and interpreted it; enriched and enlivened it; and situated it in an international world which was so remote and unknown to me.

The CBC was Jake and the Kid; Saturday Night Hockey and Saturday afternoon Opera; the Stage Series; the News and Capital Reports; and the comedy programmes which lightened our lives in a countryside which occasionally - only occasionally, of course - seemed a wee bit bleak. The CBC was not only our link with Canada; it was our Canadian theatre and newsmagazine and music hall. We loved it. And we needed it.

All of this was in the late 1930's, the 1940's and the early 1950's of course - an earlier, and in a sense much less complicated time. And it is a perception which comes from a part of the country where the CBC has always been much more important because it was all - or almost all - we had.

But I find it a rather useful ideal against which to measure the CBC and the realization of its purpose today. I find myself wondering how many of you, particularly those of you brought up in a different generation, have from your experience come to a similar or a different view about the place and the purpose of the CBC?

THE POWER AND THE POTENTIAL OF THE BROADCASTING MEDIA

Whether you have or not, there can surely be no doubt about the power and the potential of the broadcasting media in which the CBC is functioning. Its full force is revealed most starkly, I suppose, by the fact that nearly 50% of the leisure time of Canadians is spent watching television, and about 20% listening to radio. The average Canadian - if such there be - spends three hours and twenty minutes a day watching television and something over two hours a day listening to radio. It will come as no surprise that Canadians themselves recognize the force of these media: three quarters of us acknowledge that television and radio have the ability to affect our thinking.

We know, in other words, that the television we watch and the radio we listen to, have the power to influence our values, our attitudes, our perceptions, our institutions, and even our history.

This being so, we know too, if we think about it, that it is largely the CBC - not exclusively, of course, but to a very important extent - which must be relied upon to reflect through these powerful media Canadian values, Canadian attitudes and perceptions, and Canadian institutions and history.

THE CHANGED AND CHANGING POSITION OF THE CBC

Having said this, it must be acknowledged that the broadcasting environment and the CBC's place in it has changed drastically from the idyllic period which I experienced in my youth. In the first place, television has become the most pervasive and the most powerful broadcasting medium in the world. In the second, Canadians now have available to them more choice in radio and television programming than any country in the world - with most of the choice in television emanating from the United States.

This inevitably has changed the place of the CBC in this country, and greatly increased its challenge. It has even raised, in the minds of some Canadians, the question as to why, given all this choice, we need a CBC at all.

That question, it seems to me, misses the main point. The real question is whether the new broadcasting environment is contributing to the preservation and enrichment of Canadianism. And as far as the CBC is concerned, the real question is whether we can ensure a continuing expression of Canadianism without a CBC that does occupy the centre of the stage in Canadian broadcasting. I am conscious, I need hardly say, of the very important role being played in this mission by other media - in particular by our Canadian newspapers and magazines. But the power of the broadcasting media - in particular that of television - forces us to ask these fundamental questions. Are Canadian broadcasters, generally, contributing as much as they should to Canada's cultural development? And is the CBC in particular occupying as important a place as it has done, or ought to do, in the achievement of this goal?

The answer to these questions - not an entirely encouraging one, I am afraid - is to be found most starkly in the situation which now exists in English language television in our country. The fact is that, given the broadcasting milieu which has been allowed to develop, English Canadians now are spending more than two thirds of their television viewing time watching U.S. programmes. At least that is our estimate.

Think of it: two thirds of our viewing time, nearly two hours and fifteen minutes a day, is spent watching American programmes. Is it any wonder there is a growing concern that Canadians increasingly are coming to reflect in their thinking and in their perceptions American values and attitudes and institutions?

This has not come about, of this I am sure, by reason of any decline in our concern for our country. Paradoxically, indeed, Canadian nationalism has been increasing all the while we have been turning increasingly to American television programming. But our appetite for an infinity of choice - so typically Canadian, it seems to me - has led us gradually to insist upon our right to watch whatever programmes we want, whether Canadian or American or British. And this appetite is one which can be satisfied in Canada - unlike any other country in the world today - simply because we have available to us all the vast television output of a large and rich neighbour which speaks the same language as do the majority of Canadians.

How this change in the Canadian broadcasting environment has come about - and is coming about - is well known to all of us. Cable now is capable of bringing up to four U.S. channels to some 50% of Canadians, and by 1980 that figure is sure to reach around 65%. In Vancouver, the number of subscribers has already reached 80%, and Toronto 70%. One hundred percent American content, in other words, on three or four channels. Then there is one Canadian network in English Canada, and another in Ontario alone, which bring us U.S. programmes nearly 50% of the time - much of this during prime time. And there are independent stations in five metropolitan areas which do the same thing. The CBC itself televises U.S. programmes roughly 30% of the time.

Given this choice, what television do English Canadians watch? Just under 30% of their viewing time is spent on U.S. channels; about 50% on Canadian channels showing 50% U.S. content; and slightly less than 25% of viewing time is spent watching the CBC. You can see why I say that less than 1/3 of the viewing time of Canadians is spent watching Canadian programmes.

This gives rise to the question I have mentioned: why should we not simply give up on the CBC? All that would happen is that Canadians would get their service from private broadcasters.

This would not be such a great cause for alarm if it meant Canadians shifting from good CBC Canadian programming to good Canadian programming on CTV or Global or independent stations. For no institution has an inalienable right to continue regardless of the changes that have been wrought in the environment. But in fact the availability even of alternative Canadian stations seems to increase, not decrease, the viewing of U.S. programmes.

In Edmonton, to give one example, when CITY, an independent station, went on the air the percentage of viewing time spent on Canadian programmes declined from 37% to 32%. And in Ottawa when Global went on the air, the viewing of Canadian programmes declined from 28% to 24%. As one columnist put it, when speaking of increased viewing of Canadian TV stations in Toronto: "Virtually all the new viewing is going to American-made programmes carried by the Canadian services."

The point I am trying to make is clear, I am sure: when the audience, because of the multiplicity of choice, shifts away from the CBC, with its larger proportion of Canadian programming, it is to watch more and more American programmes. This is why I say that any threat to the CBC is a threat to Canadian programming. To give up on the CBC, in any substantial sense, would be to say that we should give up on Canadian television programming, and let U.S. programmes take over.

This, I am sure all Canadians would agree, cannot be allowed to happen. For if it were to do so, we as Canadians would be left to soak up largely American values and American attitudes and American perspectives and American institutions by a way of the television medium.

Forty years ago Canadians established the CBC to prevent just this thing from happening in radio.

THE GOAL FOR CANADIAN BROADCASTERS

This, then, is the dilemma facing Canadian television broadcasting today. What are we to do about it? What is the central problem to be resolved?

The answer, it seems to me, is quite straightforward: we in Canadian television - both public and private broadcasters - must so improve Canadian programming that Canadians will prefer to watch it rather than American programming.

There is no other course, really. There is no point in pretending that we could roll back cablevision so as to force Canadians to watch Canadian programmes. Even if we wanted to we couldn't. Canadians are accustomed to U.S. cable and they want it. Nor is there any point, given today's broadcasting environment, in pursuing much further Canadian content rules per se: what is wanted is Canadian viewing of Canadian programmes, not Canadian content which Canadians don't watch. And that it seems to me is what the Chairman of the CRTC is saying to us, in some of his recent statements.

It falls to us, then - to Canadian broadcasters - to meet this challenge. We should take it up, I suggest, and set ourselves a simple goal. It is this: our programming should become so good, and so worthy of being scheduled in prime time, that at least 50 percent of the viewing time of Canadians will come to be spent watching Canadian programmes rather than American ones. A goal so simply stated, but so difficult to achieve!

The CBC's part in any such objective is obvious. It is our mandate to lead the Canadian broadcasting industry in the production of distinctively Canadian programmes. That is why the Parliament of Canada created the CBC, and why we are financed in such large measure by public funds. So we must lead the way in the achievement of this goal: we must develop and enrich, as we have been doing, the pools of talent required; we must

create and maintain the environment within which creative Canadian talent can flourish; and out of this we must produce the distinctively Canadian style of broadcasting which, along with the quality of CBC programming, will draw Canadians to it. As we do this, private broadcasters will join the CBC in producing and scheduling more appealing Canadian programmes in prime time, and find it profitable to do so.

You might well express some skepticism as to the likelihood of our succeeding in any such endeavour. But let me remind you that we already have done it once. Yes! The CBC was one of the elements, if not the major one, in the development of the strong and distinctive cultural life to be found in French Canada today.

I can hear the objections: surely the language barrier made this a rather easy job in French Canada. But that is not wholly so. At the time television was brought to French Canada by the CBC, private French-Canadian radio stations were carrying the American Hit Parade, and French-Canadian theatres were showing American movies in English.

What the language barrier did was to force the development of French-Canadian programmes since French language programmes could not be bought as readily as English language programmes could be bought from the Americans. French Canada therefore created its own pool of writers and producers, and made its own stars. It had a tremendously vitalizing effect on all aspects of cultural life, to the point that private broadcasters have been able to draw on that pool of resources to make their own popular French-Canadian programmes.

Because of these developments, French Canada is now much better equipped to fight the invasion by American programmes which I must remind you is also taking place, with the expansion of cable, in Quebec and other French speaking areas of Canada. And the French networks of the CBC, radio and television, are continuing to play a vitally important role in maintaining the pool of artistic resources which are necessary to the preservation and enrichment of Canadianism in French Canada.

THE CHALLENGE FACING THE CBC

If the CBC was able to do this in French Canada, we can do it in English Canada - despite the fearsome problem of competing in the same language with the friendly giant. I say this with confidence not just because we did it in French Canada, but because the CBC has been doing it in English Canada too - albeit sometimes haltingly, sporadically, and unevenly. Look at some of the great programming: drama series such as Festival and Performance, biographies of great Canadians such as Emily Carr and Lucy Maud Montgomery; drama-documentaries like The National Dream; serious music and arts programming such as Musicamera and Norman Campbell's "Sleeping Beauty"; public affairs programmes such as The Tenth Decade and Images of Canada; diverting drama such as Quentin Durgens and The Beachcombers; situation comedies such as The Plouffe Family and the increasingly appreciated King of Kensington; light entertainment such as Wayne and Shuster.

Of course the CBC, of course Canadians can do it. Why then are we not appealing to English Canadian viewing audiences more? Why is more than two thirds of their viewing time spent watching American programmes?

There are several reasons it seems to me, the principal one being that the odds against steadily improving CBC programming are so utterly formidable. American networks spend fully three times as much in producing one hour of television as the CBC can afford to do. Three times - and there are three of them to one CBC English language network. Until these odds are reduced, it simply is unreasonable to expect the CBC to be able to compete effectively with U.S. television.

But let me not start with the money problem nor with some seemingly unsophisticated notion about "competing" with the Americans. Let me start rather with the kind of programming I think the CBC should be doing - and indeed has been building - and then talk about the means of achieving these programming objectives.

THE PROGRAMME OBJECTIVES OF THE CBC

The first objective, or ideal, in CBC programming almost goes without saying - excellence in all we do. The programmes we produce, whether the more diverting or the more discriminating, should rank with the best in the world. This must be our goal if we are to appeal to the hearts and minds of Canadians, in the face of the multiplicity of programmes available to them.

Obviously, we have been more successful in achieving this ideal in some kinds of programming than in others. Our biographies, our social documentaries, our drama documentaries, some of our dramas, certain types of our current affairs programmes - whether in English or in French - do rank with the best of their kind. Equally obvious, there are times when we achieve, or have achieved, a zenith in certain kinds of programming, and then have not been able to sustain it. The Plouffe Family is a good example. These differing degrees of success - in different areas of programming and at different points in time - are bound to occur in broadcasting.

There are, however, some areas of broadcasting where we must concede that on balance we have not been able - at least not consistently - to produce Canadian programmes which have as much appeal as the better American and British ones. Here I am speaking of light entertainment - comedy and variety and of light drama - suspense stories, family dramas, and situation comedies. We must be prepared, therefore, at least so it seems to me, to attach as high a priority to achieving excellence in these more diverting areas of programming - at least in as many hours of such programming as we can afford - as we attach to achieving excellence in the more thoughtful, more discriminating areas of programming.

In plain words, if we're going to do it, we had better do it well. If we don't, we won't contribute to the achievement of the overall goal - 50 percent of the viewing time of Canadians being spent watching Canadian programmes.

This brings me to the second objective of CBC programming - balance. There are some who will disagree with the proposition I have just advanced - namely that we ought to decide how much of the more diverting programming the CBC can afford, and then attach as high a priority to excellence in that area as we do to the more discriminating programmes. These critics argue that the CBC should give up on the more diverting areas of programming and leave them to the Americans. They do them well. Canadians don't do them well, and can't do them well. And let's leave it at that.

My response, straight off, is that it simply isn't true that Canadians can't do diverting programming well. We have done some of it well - very well indeed. And the fact that we have done the more discriminating programming more consistently well, does not mean that we lack the capacity to do diverting programming well.

But the more important point, surely, is that if we concede this argument we are saying, in effect, that we will leave to the Americans the programming which Canadians watch most - or most of the time - the more diverting comedies and soap operas and suspense dramas and all. Which would be to say "We don't care if Canadians soak up U.S. values and attitudes and traditions and institutions as they watch these diverting programmes."

We should make no mistake about this being the result. Watching American programming is not just a matter of learning the names of American places and personalities, and hearing about American events. It is a matter of absorbing American interpretations of events, of soaking up the value system of American metropolitan society, and of coming to expect Canadian traditions and institutions to look and behave as if they were American traditions and institutions. This is not a matter of being anti-American: it is simply a matter of whether we care enough about remaining Canadian.

Well I care. The CBC cares. And Parliament cares, else why would the CBC have been established to "safeguard, enrich and strengthen the cultural, political, social and economic fabric of Canada"? And why would we have been told to provide "a balanced service of information, enlightenment and entertainment" programming?

May I add one further dimension to this question of balance in programming. To say that the CBC should strive to do some first rate programming of the more diverting kind, as well as first rate programming of the more discriminating kind, is not to utter a contradiction. Surely we can do both. We now are doing both - perhaps not always as well as we would like - but very well indeed, if you look at the totality of our production.

What we have to recognize is that we can't allocate all of our resources to reflective programming, nor all of our resources to compete with the U.S. networks hour for hour in the production of diverting programming. Some compromises have to be made.

I see nothing sinister about a compromise. Every decision in life is a compromise - an ordering of values, of preferences, of priorities in order that a choice or a decision can be made. It is the same with decisions in the home, at work, in government, in business, or in the cultural life of our country. This is why I sometimes become impatient with the "populist vs elitist" programming dichotomy. It is a bit unreal. Surely there are some intellectuals - some of you in this room - who enjoy on occasion watching a diverting programme, like football, or a movie, or even All in the Family. And surely there are some less intellectually inclined people who enjoy watching CBC dramas, drama-documentaries, and public affairs?

Let's not be diverted by arguments over that dichotomy. Let's concentrate on determining the optimum balance on the CBC networks between the more diverting and the more discriminating programming; let's concentrate on doing well what we decide to do; and above all let's concentrate on making all of our programming distinctive.

This is the third objective of CBC programming - distinctiveness. It must apply throughout our programming - the more diverting as well as the more discriminating. What do I mean by distinctiveness?

In a way, I think, the best answer to that question is to be found in CBC radio - English and French. There, it seems to me, we have more truly found ourselves - and our place in the broadcasting system. How many times have I been told, since becoming President of the CBC, "When I tune in to CBC radio, I know I am listening to the CBC." Or, "There is a quality in CBC radio that stands out - not just so far above commercial radio - but a quality that is distinctive, and distinctively Canadian." Or "There is a sound about CBC radio, a feeling about it, that makes me recognize it as being Canadian, as being me.

How do you give words to feeling like these? I suppose it is a matter of CBC radio having been able, in that medium, to find how to reflect what we are and what we face; what we have been and what we have become; what our hopes are, and our apprehensions; what we find amusing and what we find troubling. It is a matter of CBC radio being a Canadian thing - something that you can identify with because you recognize it as having identified something that is part of you, that belongs to you.

I think, too, that radio has been able, with fewer distractions, to concern itself with the personal and local, the regional and national interests of Canadians - with their social, cultural, economic and political concerns. It has been able through long experience, and by reason of the nature of the medium, to place Canada in the world, in the light of our endowments and our history.

And CBC radio has developed its own Canadian brand of broadcasting professionalism. It has not had to compete with American brand of professionalism as television has had to do. It has not sought to enter into any race with Canadian commercial radio - nor has it had to. As a result, CBC radio, at least so it seems to me, has developed its own un-selfconscious brand of professionalism, which our listeners recognize as being distinctively Canadian.

English language television, on the other hand, has faced a much more difficult task.

First, the costs of television programming are so great, and its technology so complex, that producers and performers and technicians simply cannot compensate through their ingenuity and creativity for inadequate resources. Our people need as many writers, as many cameras, as much editing, as elaborate sets as the Americans have, if they are to be compared with them. And always the quality of Canadian productions is being compared with that of the much richer American ones.

Secondly, the CBC has not been able to afford to produce exclusively Canadian programming. This is simply because our budget would have had to be very much larger to produce Canadian programmes to replace the American and British ones we now carry. And the budget would have to be larger still to produce Canadian programmes which, over time, would come to compete in quality, if not style, with the better U.S. programmes being carried on other networks.

The third problem, it seems to me, is that English Canadians have become accustomed, by reason of their heavy exposure, to U.S. television, to the American brand of slick professionalism. And this places enormous pressure on Canadian producers to match that "professionalism" - with all its attendant dangers that Canadian programmes will come to look like American ones, not distinctively Canadian ones. Professionalism, after all, is not a universal quality: it carries with it cultural overtones. And the development of a Canadian professional style - or its emergence - is part of being Canadian.

So the odds facing television, English language television in particular, are enormous: the over-weening presence of American television in the homes of most Canadians, and the fact that Canadian producers and performers and technicians are trying to produce distinctively Canadian programmes at one third the cost of the competing American ones.

Having said all of this, I think CBC television has made very real, very substantial strides towards developing its own distinctive style - much much more than its critics claim. Look at the successes, after all: the Tenth Decade; The National Dream; Man Alive; the biographies of great Canadians; and all the rest I have mentioned.

What we must develop, if we are to build on the CBC's successes, is greater consistency in our programming - not only consistency in quality, but consistency in the scheduling of different kinds of programmes. By that I mean consistency in the appearance of programmes regularly within the schedule, and consistency or regularity from season to season. This is the fourth objective of CBC television programming.

What we need, it seems to me, is certain time periods when we can expect Canadian programming of different kinds: that at a certain time one will find good Canadian comedy drama; at another time Canadian variety shows; at another Canadiana, such as biographies and historical dramas; at still another public affairs programmes; at other times arts and cultural programming. And we must be prepared, as Canadian programmes achieve the quality expected of them, to schedule them in the prime of prime time, displacing some of the American programmes which now enjoy this position of preeminence. Thus will we build a more distinctive character to CBC television, recognizable to Canadians, and appreciated by them as being uniquely Canadian.

To achieve this consistency takes resources and time. We have to be able to build up teams of writers, and be able to keep them. We must be able to promise our best producers the resources required to continue their successes in their chosen fields. We must be able to assure Canadian writers, actors, and actresses the sustained employment in television, along with that in the theatre, that is required to maintain lively drama across the country.

We must also be prepared to take risks in Canadian programming, and keep our patience as programme series develop. In Canadian television that is not so easy, since there are so many choices to which Canadians can turn when CBC programmes are less than successful. The temptation is always to cancel and to try something else which will compete with U.S. programming - and evoke less public criticism. Yet if we succumb to this temptation, we will have spotty, erratic programming - programming which does not build towards the consistently distinctive Canadian television which we believe the CBC should provide.

REALIZING THE CBC'S PROGRAMME OBJECTIVES

These, then, are the programme objectives which must be realized if CBC programming is to bring more Canadians to spend more of their viewing time watching Canadian rather than American television - excellence, balance, distinctiveness, and consistency.

What is required to realize these objectives is self-evident: creativity, and resources. The creativity Canadian producers and performers and technicians can provide, of that I am confident: what they cannot overcome are the odds which are stacked against good Canadian programming.

Let me recount the odds for you again. The American commercial networks spend, as far as we can gather, about three times as much per hour of television as does the CBC. Three dollars to every dollar we spend. They spend $4\frac{1}{2}$ to five times what we do on a situation comedy; they spend $3\frac{1}{2}$ to four times what the CBC spends on a variety show; they spend three times what we do on a drama special; and they spend more than ten times what we do per hour of news programming.

Is it any wonder Canadian television has trouble competing? We are being told, in effect: "Operate in a totally unprotected market, but do it with one third the budget of your competitors."

Now I am not saying that I expect Parliament to appropriate for the CBC as large an amount for an hour of television as the U.S. networks spend. But I do insist that the odds must be reduced: that there is a price for remaining Canadian.

The Government of Canada, and Parliament as a whole, I am confident, recognizes, this need. Indeed the CBC has set itself the target of a regular annual increase in the allocation of real resources to radio and TV programming - over and above price increases - and the Government has said it will accept and support this priority. For this coming year this will mean about a five percent growth in programming expenditures, over and above price and wage increases.

What is called for in the longer run is the acceptance by the Canadian people of the goal I have suggested for Canadian broadcasting: that Canadian television programming should be so improved that at least 50% of our viewing time will be spent watching Canadian programmes, and that the resources required by CBC to lead in achieving this goal will steadily be increased. To the extent that we fail in achieving our goal, the 50% viewing time goal, we must be prepared, it seems to me, to increase the rate at which resources are allocated.

THE OBLIGATIONS ON THE CBC

Let me conclude by saying that I quite recognize, as President of the CBC, that we must earn the right to the kind of support I am seeking. We must earn it by the effective and efficient use of the money Canadians give us, through Parliament. I believe the CBC is far more efficient than some of our critics suggest, but I intend to establish review mechanisms to ensure that this is so. We must earn the right to your increasing support by producing distinctively Canadian programmes, not American copies. We must earn your support by remaining sensitive to the changing values and the changing social problems Canadians confront, and not succumb to the temptation to programme for ourselves, the "insiders", in the broadcasting field. We must earn your support by accepting wholeheartedly the responsibilities of a national broadcasting system - that of reflecting and interpreting, faithfully and with insight - when required with daring - the reality of Canada, its several regions and cultural groups, and its two major linguistic groups.

These responsibilities, these challenges, are, I am firmly convinced - even after only nine months with the CBC - fully accepted by every CBC broadcaster and technician and administrator. But we need something more - and here I should like to speak in very personal terms.

I know full well that what I have said about the challenge to Canadianism and the challenge to Canadian broadcasting will come as no surprise to the "insiders" in broadcasting and the arts. But if it is so obvious, how is it then - may I be forgiven for asking - that the Canadian people and their leaders are so littled seized of the problem? How is it that the broadcasting industry has become further fragmented and divided, rather than having come together to meet this obvious and central problem?

I know, too, that what I have said about CBC programming will contain no surprises to "insiders". To say we must have excellence and balance and distinctiveness and consistency is not to postulate some grand new principles. How is it then that the obstacles to realizing these principles have so stubbornly persisted?

My proposition, as a newcomer to broadcasting, is that we had better set for ourselves a straightforward target that Canadians generally will understand and accept. My proposition is that our success or failure as Canadian institutions should be judged on the basis of such a straightforward target.

My further proposition is that broadcasters alone will not achieve this goal. We cannot by simply searching our souls or excoriating the bureaucracy achieve the goal.

Of course we need a philosophy. Of course our programming must constantly reach down to find and renew its roots in the diversity of Canadian society.

But we need above all the support of the Canadian people. We need their sense of commitment to Canadian cultural survival and to the central part of the CBC and national broadcasting in it. We need their recognition of the price of an infinity of choice. We need their understanding that arguments over regionalism, or elitist vs populist programming, must be balanced with the imperative of cultural survival. We need their willingness to place in the same context their preferences - sometimes their demands - for an emphasis on particular kinds of programming.

It is this kind of commitment which is the condition of all else we do. That is why I have put to you the goal that I have.