

CBC FACES THE CHALLENGE OF CHANGE

ADDRESS BY

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TO THE

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Mr. President. Members of the Canadian Club of Toronto.

I want to begin by thanking you, not only for your very kind words of introduction, but especially for the opportunity given to me today to address such an important and representative body as the Men's Canadian Club of Toronto. Shortly after the announcement of my new appointment to the Presidency of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, Ross Munro phoned to cash in on an old acquaintanceship by asking me to speak at this, your Annual Meeting. Following my acceptance, Ross concluded, I gather, that his future in Toronto was limited; this, I am told, was one of the factors prompting him to accept, shortly after, his new appointment as Publisher of the Edmonton Journal. Despite this evidence of a certain lack of faith in my performance today and in your acceptance of his good intentions, I thank Ross Munro most warmly for his part in bringing me before you at this luncheon meeting.

The problems and the challenges which I wish to discuss with you today, as they concern the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, are problems and challenges affecting the lives of all Canadians; for it is literally true that the CBC, through its nationwide television and radio services in French and English, reaches out to touch the minds, the lives and the pocketbooks of all Canadians. Potentially, if not actually, Radio Canada is our greatest single Canadian communications instrument -- permitting Canadians to see each other, hear each other, visit each other's part of our vast country, and hopefully to understand each other a little better than would otherwise be possible.

For over a generation now the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation has served as an instrument for the building, for the welding together of a vigorous, dynamic, sometimes controversial, always action-oriented twentieth century Canadian society.

In playing its part in this turbulent, restless, ever-changing society, the CBC has had its share of trials and tribulations. It has sailed at times through stormy seas. Its moments of strain and crisis have been perhaps more memorable than the more frequent moments of quiet, solid accomplishment which have gained for it a solid and respected place in the minds and hearts of millions of Canadians.

None of this, of course, is new. It is part of a story that is already written in the history of our nation over the past half century; it is part of the experience that the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation together with its colleagues and partners in the private sector of the industry have lived through in the decades since radio first began to push back the frontiers of communication in this country. The significance of this brief recollection of the past is that today we stand, I believe, at the beginning of a new era in the story of broadcasting in Canada, an era in which the CBC and its non-governmental partners in

the world of broadcasting will face new trials which will test to the limit our ingenuity, our resourcefulness and our statesmanship. It is to some of these challenges, particularly as they affect the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, that I should like to direct your attention for a little while this afternoon.

First of all, let me say a word about the new elements in the broadcasting picture, as I see them at this moment. This will help to explain my conviction that the winds of change are blowing across the face of the broadcasting world in Canada today more strongly than on any previous occasion, with possibly one or two exceptions, in our history.

Earlier this month, the people of Canada acquired a new Prime Minister, our first leader of a national government born in the twentieth century. As a consequence of a new Prime Minister, we also have technically if not actually, a new government.

Admittedly, most of the faces have a vaguely familiar look about them. But a new government it is nonetheless. Furthermore, with dissolution now a fact, and a general election in the offing, we Canadians can look forward to a time within the next sixty days when we will have a new Parliament and possibly even, - who knows at this moment, - another new Prime Minister and another new government.

"In God's Good Time" as someone recently said in Ottawa, we will know how much of the machinery of our national government will be really new; but no one who lives around the nation's capital or indeed in any part of Canada that is in touch with national events will deny that recent weeks and months have brought major changes in the scenery which adorns our nation's political stage, and major changes in the cast of characters as well.

Coming closer to the world of broadcasting, we also find much that is changed, - much that is new.

Since April 1st, of this year we have a brand new Broadcasting Act to serve as the charter, to provide the frame of reference for all our activities in the world of broadcasting, both public and private, in this country. A new regulatory body has been established within the framework of this legislation, -- the Canadian Radio-Television Commission, with a board of 15 members, only one of whom is carried over from the previous regulatory body, the Board of Broadcast Governors. More than that, a new Canadian Broadcasting Corporation has been established under this new legislation, to operate side by side with its private enterprise partners, under the watchful eye of this new regulatory body. The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation in its turn, has a new Board of Directors made up of 15 members, only one of whom, - your speaker of today with three months' experience behind him, - is a carry-over from the previous Corporation.

All of the elements I have mentioned are new and in large part untested and untried. These instrumentalities in the field of public broadcasting, in the regulation of broadcasting, the new legislation which we now have on the statute books of Canada, -- all these will have to be tested and tried in a period of rapid change. During this period the broadcasting industry in Canada faces not only a continuation of its old problems in the known environment, but also additional challenges which will inevitably confront us in the new era of satellite communications. Educational television too, and cable television, with all the demands that they will make upon the communications media, will add inevitably to the complexities of the rapidly changing world of communications we are now entering. This is why, I repeat, this moment in time appears to be one when we are passing over a watershed in the history of Canadian broadcasting. There is more that is new, unknown and untested in our broadcasting world today than at any time since the advent of television.

So far as the CBC is concerned, there are more new challenges, both technological and other, facing us today, than at almost any other time in the Corporation's history. Much of the future of the nation depends on how the Corporation faces and meets the emerging challenge of these times.

What is the essential nature of the challenge that we face? The new Broadcasting Act spells out the challenge and the task for the Canadian broadcasting industry more clearly, I believe, than it has ever been specified before. The directions which the new Broadcasting Act lays down are, in their broad outlines at least, unmistakably clear for the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation and also, I believe, for the private broadcasters as well. We have, both public and private broadcasters alike, a trust to assume - a responsibility to discharge on behalf of the nation as a whole.

Within the parameters laid down by the legislation which Parliament has approved, it is the duty of the Canadian broadcasting system, -- and that includes both public and private broadcasters, -- to assure a varied and comprehensive programming fare to the nation, a balanced presentation of news objectively presented, and fair and free public discussion of important issues of the day by persons free to express opposing points of view within the normal limits of responsible public debate.

The Parliamentary injunction to the broadcasting industry goes even further, in imposing the obligation on the industry to maintain high qualitative standards in its programming; to recognize the bilingual, bicultural character of our nation, by accepting and discharging an obligation to provide a broadcasting service in both official languages; and by strengthening the essentially Canadian character of our broadcasting

enterprise through effective Canadian ownership and control and through the use of Canadian creative and other resources.

More specific directions are given by Parliament in respect of the national broadcasting service to be provided through the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. The Corporation is required to provide a national service that is predominantly Canadian in content and character. It must extend this service directly or indirectly through its affiliates or in other ways to all parts of Canada. It must assume the specific obligation to provide a national broadcasting service in both French and English, to serve the special needs of geographical regions of the country, and to contribute actively to the flow and exchange of cultural and regional information and entertainment between the different parts of Canada, both geographical and ethnic.

The Corporation created to provide this national broadcasting service is specifically enjoined by the law to provide through this service a balanced fare of information, enlightenment and entertainment for people of different ages, interests and tastes, covering the whole range of programming in fair proportion.

This total service, described as I have described it in words which are taken from the Broadcasting Act itself, must have as its objective under the law the obligation to contribute to the development of national unity and to provide for a continuing expression of Canadian identity.

The words which Parliament has used and which I have quoted from the Act itself leave little room for doubt as to what Parliament expects of the Canadian broadcasting system, made up of public and private broadcasters alike; even less does Parliament leave room for doubt as to what is to be expected of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation.

Broadcasting is given here an assignment in nationwide enlightenment; a directive aimed at the maintenance and strengthening of our national integrity; a mandate to reinforce those elements in our life which undergird our viability as a cohesive, unified society. It is given to us as a task to bring Canadians together, through the magic of communications, to achieve mutual understanding, and to seek the goals and aspirations which Canadians, as citizens of the world living together on this northern half of a vast continent, must seek and share in common.

The public broadcasting corporation understandably has a more direct obligation placed upon its shoulders than its partners in the private broadcasting sector; but that being said it remains clear that the Parliament of the nation expects all segments of the broadcasting industry to share the common obligation of mobilizing Canadian talents and resources to reveal to all the people of our country, in a language and cultural environment that they understand, the many and varied facets of the life of Canada of which they are inescapably a part.

The Act expresses a belief, and I for one share that belief, - that in so doing, in helping to keep Canadians conscious of our own identity through using Canadian talent and resources to reveal ourselves to one another, we will be making our own distinctive contribution to the concept of a Canadian society in which all Canadians whatever their differences in language, origin or culture may be, can seek and find fulfillment of their human goals and aspirations.

There may be some who will say, at this point, that I am placing a very strained interpretation on the provisions of the Broadcasting Act, and attributing to them a significance and importance which they do not in fact possess. Each individual is, of course, free to place his own interpretation upon the words which I have cited, - words taken from the Act itself. This portion of the Act is admittedly declaratory in nature.

The words are general and sometimes vague and open to a wide variety of possible interpretation. I give you my interpretations of these words, in which others may not altogether agree, I believe that the interpretation which I have given you accords with the high purposes which Parliament had in mind when it laid these responsibilities on those charged with the development of public and private broadcasting services throughout Canada. If what I have suggested is an accurate interpretation of the objectives of this legislation, then truly the Canadian broadcasting system and, in particular, the national broadcasting service of the CBC has had laid upon it a sobering national responsibility to play a major role in maintaining and strengthening the very fabric of our national life. I know of no more worthwhile challenge to any Canadian who loves his country.

If this, then, is the challenge facing Canadian broadcasting, how are we going to meet that challenge? I will not try to answer this question on behalf of the private broadcasting sector, whose capable and persuasive spokesmen will answer it, I am sure, in their own behalf. I would like, however, in the few minutes that remain to me to offer a number of suggestions as to what the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation will have to do, and will do, if it is to measure up to the very special responsibilities laid upon it as a public body by the provisions of the new broadcasting legislation.

The Act calls upon the CBC -- and upon it exclusively -- to "contribute to development of national unity and provide for a continuing expression of Canadian identity."

I regard this as our most difficult, our greatest challenge.

It is made more difficult because, in the absence of any definition in the legislation itself, it falls upon us to decide the meaning of expressions such as "national unity" and "Canadian identity". The meaning of national unity cannot, of course, be determined as a matter of legislative definition; nor can it be determined in its final essence by a body such as the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, endeavouring to discharge a mandate placed upon it by the Parliament of the nation. National unity, in the final analysis, is a concept of nationhood that is determined by the people of the nation itself. The national broadcasting service must, however, interpret this as best it can, as it endeavours to discharge its mandate from day to day, and from year to year. In doing so we must develop and endeavour to adhere to some fundamental concepts as to the meaning of the words which Parliament has prescribed for us -- but not defined.

First of all, then, we must believe in Canada as a whole; and we must believe in holding it together. We must also believe that each part of our far-flung country is as precious to the concept of Canada as any other part. We must believe that the integrity of Canada is best preserved by creating, in every part of our land, an understanding and appreciation of the richness that is added to the fabric of Canadian life by the linguistic and cultural diversity which has been the distinguishing mark of our Canadian society during the first hundred years of its existence. We must endeavour, as a public broadcasting agency, to bring the "two solitudes" together and, more than that, to give to every region of this vast territory an understanding of its own place in the total Canadian society; a lively appreciation of the distinctive contribution which it is capable of making; as well as an awareness of the richness that is added to its own life, in its own part of Canada, by its close and intimate association with other regions.

In all this effort communication stands as the inevitable key, - communication between the different people and regions of our nation, maintained and strengthened, not through the physical network of communications that we have built up across this country, -- however important they may be, -- but through the content of the programs that are fashioned and produced in Canada and fed as part of the living reality of our land through radio and television into the homes and the lives of all Canadians. Only through the substance and the content of our broadcasting effort, only through programming, can we catch the minds and reach the hearts and souls of Canadians. Only through programming can we reflect and test -- yes, and influence, -- the pulse, the heartbeat of Canada.

There are, of course, many different kinds of programming, not all of which do very much to "contribute to the development of national unity"; to assist in the development of Canadian creative talent; to show the

regions of Canada one to the other; to interpret the French or English "facts" to our respective English-language and French-language populations; or to "provide for a continuing expression of Canadian identity". What kinds of programming, then, do we need to encourage and develop if we are to live up to the challenge that these times and this enactment place upon us?

I can take a number of examples from recent broadcasting history without fear that anyone will take issue with me. It seems to me that the live coverage given in recent months to the two great leadership conventions of the two major political parties in Canada was a service given in the national interest; a service which provided for a continuing expression of Canadian identity; a service which could never have been contributed by agencies other than those operating in, and for,

the people of Canada; and a service which, in its own way, contributed to the development of Canadian unity. Please note that, in what I have just said, I have included not just the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation but the total Canadian broadcasting system. It seems to me, also, that our live coverage of the Premiers' Conference, in Toronto last November, and our live coverage of the Federal-Provincial Conference in Ottawa, in February of this year, provide other examples of a broadcasting service dedicated to the purposes of serving the national interest, and thereby contributing to the strengthening of our national objectives. By programming activities such as these, and many others of a similar nature, we can, I am sure, provide through French and English radio and television outlets, both public and private, the means whereby Canadians can become involved in the choices and options available to them in all the areas of public policy which are of concern to the nation as a whole.

It is only as these choices and options are made known and understood that clear decisions can be made by the people of our country with maximum knowledge and understanding of the issues involved, and of the consequences of the decisions made.

The question of Canadian identity is another facet of the same problem. Here, again, there is no concept of Canadian identity laid down in the legislation itself or promulgated by an all-powerful state. What is it? We must decide this for ourselves and then, through broadcasting, we must serve to communicate it. We must do so in an infinite variety of ways -- through public affairs, Canadian drama, Canadian music, variety shows and entertainment, and a host of other programming means and forms. In French Canada, broadcasting has succeeded, I think, in capturing and reflecting the throb of a cultural and a political awakening that is both exciting and dynamic, -- and, to some disturbing.

In English Canada, we have in the drama field such successful efforts as the Wojcek and Quentin Durgens series; programs that capture something of the flavor of Canadian institutions, not only in the persons depicted by these series, but in the location shooting, the Canadian topics and concerns dealt with, and the social institutions reflected by the programs. In music, we offer greater support, through CBC radio, to live concerts and similar performances than any other body in Canada. In sports, in variety, in public affairs, in schools and children's programming, in women's programming, in farm programming, in a host of areas of broadcasting concern, we mirror day by day the dynamics of our Canadian society.

And we try -- and will try harder in the future so far as the CBC is concerned -- to let English and French Canadians get to know each other. The language barrier is massive in this respect, but it is not insurmountable. And on occasions such as Expo, or Centennial when we Canadians get together to do something really spectacular, we in CBC together with our partners in the private broadcasting industry, are there to let everybody from coast to coast know what Canadians have done. Centennial year presented us with enormous opportunities for this kind of service and we provided it. We saw the miracle of Expo, not only through our own eyes, but through the probing eyes of CBC and private television. We sped down the ski slopes at Grenoble, France, victoriously with Nancy Greene and once again at home, at Rossland -- and we felt a little more strongly our Canadian identity because we were there with Canadian television.

In the future the CBC must strive even harder in both our French and English services to do an even better job of capturing the spirit of the people we are serving.

As public funds are made available we must continue to extend French and English programming across Canada. The new Act calls upon us to do just that. At the moment, our French radio network stretches from Vancouver to Nova Scotia. Our French television network provides service, imperfectly and inadequately, from Manitoba to Nova Scotia. We must do more to aid the bilingual and bicultural development of our nation. In the coming decade the CBC must help Canadians to realize the bilingual and bicultural objectives of our society that the Laurendeau-Dunton Commission foresaw and demanded.

And, -- make no mistake about it, -- our help as broadcasters will be necessary. For even if French and English schools are provided, even if legislatures, courts and public services become increasingly bilingual, it will still be essential, -- if French or English speaking Canadians are to feel at home in all parts of Canada -- that radio and television should be there to serve them and to entertain, inform and enlighten them in their mother language. The national broadcasting service must therefore play its part in building the kind of society that will allow the aspirations of all of us as Canadians to be realized -- and to build a new Canada, a unique country in a world of conflict.

Programming for Canadians, by Canadians, cannot of course be divorced from distribution. It is not only a question of making the programs in Canada for Canadians:

We must also provide the means of getting them distributed to ensure that all Canadians can see them. Thus, for the past decade, the CBC priority has been on distribution. The government's White Paper of 1966 confirmed this. The CBC has had to ensure that everybody was served and the CBC, along with 20 million Canadians, has had to recognize that the quality of programming has suffered as a result.

I ask whether the time has not now come to change the priority. Certainly we must continue to extend our service and we must allow for the extension of French and English facilities. But I believe our physical distribution plant has now reached the point where we must take another look at the place of programming in our priorities.

Certain things seem clear to me. The CBC must have a greater proportion of Canadian programs than it has to-day. The CBC must, in so far as its non-Canadian content is concerned, devise a better balance between U.S., U.K., French and other foreign programs.

The CBC must pay more attention to developing Canadian performing talent, both in French and in English. The CBC must renew itself as a prime developer of Canadian talent in every field. If we do not, if we fail to find ourselves in time, we may end up with superb technical facilities and little or nothing to show on them in the way of quality Canadian programs. I have read that there are some, not far from Toronto, who think that we have reached that deplorable state already. I do not agree: and I do not propose to allow that gloomy prophecy to be realized during my term of office in the presidency of the Corporation.

What will the CBC be in the near-future world of the television society? How can we plan for this future? What will be expected of us? None of these simple questions can be answered very certainly even by those who have spent a lifetime in the broadcasting business.

I may be a neophyte, but I am not such a fool as to try to answer all of these questions today.

What seems clear, however, is that regardless of how diverse the use of television becomes, there will still, for the foreseeable future, remain for Canadians the need for a "balanced service of information, enlightenment and entertainment for people of different ages, interests and tastes", to quote again from the new broadcasting legislation. Radio and television have a thousand uses in the modern world, yet a public, national broadcasting service is as necessary in this country today as it has been at any time in history.

It is in the spirit of all these demands and uncertainties that the CBC and the broadcasting industry in Canada face the future.

There is a new spirit alive in Canada, a new ferment which if properly understood, can be a force for greatness. All around us there are signs of this ferment -- in the arts, in business, in resource development, in academic circles, in government. Change is the order of the day. The old is giving way to the new with a vengeance and this vast country of ours is exploding with the vigor of renewal and reform in every area.

This is what CBC and broadcasting generally should be concerned about. We should want to see that the stuff of Canada gets onto your screen. We should want to ensure that this Canadian spirit which we have all felt, especially in Centennial and Expo year, is kept alive, and is reflected in CBC programming, and that the CBC is a part of the whole exciting scene. We should want to ensure that the CBC is contemporary in its organization and its physical plant in order that it may be

contemporary in its programming -- because, after all programming is all that really matters in the end.

Some there are, I suppose, who would argue, even now, that there is no need for a publicly-supported national broadcasting service. I doubt that many Canadians would really support that proposition. Try to picture Canada without it -- without Wojeck, or CBC Festival, without CBC radio music or CBC news or drama, without any broadcasting facilities in the North or overseas to our Armed Services, without Don Messer, Maureen Forrester or Glenn Gould, without Max Ferguson, without Quentin Durgens, or Earl Cameron or Stanley Burke, or all the myriad names and faces and voices that the CBC over the years has brought into the homes of millions of Canadians.

The CBC, with all its faults, is part of Canada; and Canada is, and must be, not only part of, but the focal point of everything that is the CBC.

Our programs must improve and rise to the never-ending challenge of presenting a true and faithful image of a great and growing Canada in an ever-changing world.

That is the challenge that the national broadcasting service faces in the years immediately ahead. How we face and meet it will be of critical importance to all Canadians and to the future of our beloved nation.