

CANADA'S BROADCASTING PIONEERS:
1918 - 1932

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Radio came to Canada in 1918. Until 1932, private broadcasters dominated the radio industry. Early radio technology and government regulation influenced the level of programming provided by the broadcasting pioneers.

La radio est venue au Canada en 1918. Jusqu'à 1932, les émissions privées ont dominé l'industrie de la radiodiffusion. La jeune technologie radiophonique et la régulation gouvernementale ont influencé la qualité de la programmation préparée par les pionniers de la radiodiffusion.

The history of Canadian broadcasting, for the most part, has drawn the attention of scholars only in recent years. As a result, the scope of the material written on the subject is somewhat limited though of a high calibre. Parliamentary debate and public enquiry generally have focused on the structure of the broadcast industry in the country. Accordingly, most scholarly studies have concentrated on the beginnings of the Canadian Broadcasting Corpora-

tion and its role -- or lack of role -- in the daily lives of Canadians (Peers, 1969; 1979). This public broadcasting bias in the literature has been at the expense of the private broadcasters. In his extensive survey entitled **Canadian Broadcasting History Resources in English: Critical Mass or Mess?**, John E. Twomey (1978, 14) has noted that "very little mention is made of the growth of the private broadcasting sector, or of programming and program personalities." Part of the reason for this omission is that the topic is not one that can be comprehended solely through the use of traditional sources. Indeed early broadcasting is singularly lacking in historical documentation. While examination of the available documents relating to the period is important, the oral history perspective is crucial to any systematic analysis.

Apologists for state ownership of broadcasting in Canada have tended to dismiss the broadcasting pioneers somewhat hastily. In the process, they have argued that the relatively low power of the early stations provided limited service, that stations brought listeners unexciting and uninspired programs, and that network broadcasting rested almost solely with Henry Thornton and the Canadian National Railways (O'Brien, 1964, 33 - 40; Peers, 1969, 19 - 27; Prang, 1965, 3 - 4). These arguments, which the Canadian Radio League advanced most forcefully in the early 1930s, are open to question when the early private broadcasters are examined more closely (Dewar, 1982, 40 - 43).

Therefore, while historians have provided solid accounts of the origins and growth of the public broadcasting sector, they have tended, at

the same time, to pay scant attention to the private broadcasters who operated stations in Canada for more than a decade prior to the establishment of the Canadian Radio Broadcasting Commission, the first public broadcasting agency in the country. Thus the following study attempts to assess this early period by examining how the state of early radio technology and the scope of government regulation of the medium influenced programming formats and network services provided by Canada's broadcasting pioneers.

The Technology and the Regulatory Framework

The story of Guglielmo Marconi's experiments with electromagnetic waves, the signals which emanate from a radio transmitter, has remained famous in history because it marked the beginning of radio communication (Sobel, 1976, 126). On December 12, 1901 at approximately 12:30 p.m., Marconi and his assistant George Kemp received transmissions of the letter "S" in Morse code from Poldhu in Cornwall, England. For Canadians, Marconi's achievement has had a special significance because his successful experiment was conducted on Signal Hill overlooking St. John's, Newfoundland (Curlook, 1981, 60). Thereafter he was to enter agreement with the Laurier government for the further development of wireless. Just a year after he left Newfoundland, Marconi was successful in negotiating a financial arrangement with the federal government whereby he received \$ 75,000 in assistance and "the prime plot of Glace Bay, Cape Breton for a permanent installation" (Curlook, 1981, 63). The government of the day had

sought to turn Marconi's invention to its advantage. In return for his subsidy, Marconi promised that overseas wireless rates would not exceed 10 cents a word for private messages and 15 cents per word for the government and the press. Hence, in 1902, the Marconi Wireless Telegraph Company of Canada was established, the forerunner to Canadian Marconi. A year earlier, a Canadian, Reginald Aubrey Fessenden, who was backed by Pittsburgh financiers, conducted his first successful experiment in voice transmission. Fessenden later formed the National Electric Signalling Company and in 1906 sent his voice over the air in a Christmas Eve broadcast. On New Year's Eve, another of his voice transmissions was received in the West Indies leaving no doubt that Fessenden had improved upon Marconi's earlier work (Sobel, 1976, 128).

Not surprisingly, it was Marconi's company that opened station XWA in late 1918 (Allard, 1979, 7). The station located in Montreal was licensed the following year with the call letters CFCF, the designation the station retains to this day. As Professor Peers has written, "it is without rival as the pioneer Canadian station" (1969, 5). More recently, Donald Godfrey (1982, 69) has argued that CFCF could well be "North America's oldest broadcasting station" predating KDKA in Pittsburgh, the station which generally has claimed that title. Following the establishment of CFCF, broadcaster-businessmen dominated the broadcasting system for more than a decade until public broadcasting was introduced in 1932. Just three years after the licensing of CFCF, thirty-nine broadcasting stations were serving listeners and six years later the number had risen to sixty-eight (Canada Gazette, 1929, 2306). That Canadians eagerly embraced

this new form of technology is evident in that four-hundred thousand receiving sets were in operation throughout the country by 1928, the year in which the Aird Commission was appointed to examine the entire broadcasting industry in Canada.

In any consideration of the pioneer days of broadcasting, it is important to realize that the daring entrepreneurs, who opened stations, were initially more concerned with the technical aspect of broadcasting than with the art of programming. Vic George, a former manager of CFCF, has observed that "in the 1920s and early 1930s a few people were feeling their way around in a completely new and different world" (George, 1977) Early radio stations were almost invariably owned and operated by auto supply companies, newspapers, religious groups or radio associations. It was quite common for the profits of an automotive service station to subsidize a fledgling radio operation. Typical of the latter was Roy Thomson who started his communications career in 1928 at North Bay and established a radio station to promote the sale of batteries to provide power for the receiving sets (Allard, 1979, 48). A.A. Murphy did the same at CFQC radio in Saskatoon as did Arthur "Sparks" Holstead at CFDC in Nanaimo, British Columbia, the call letters "DC" standing for "direct current" (Quinney 1976). Indeed this kind of enterprising individual could be found in just about every province.

Certainly radio equipment was primitive in nature. Stations relied heavily on batteries to stay on the air and generally could do so for an average of only six hours and fifteen minutes a day. Radio transmitters, which could cost as

little as four thousand dollars in this period, were crude instruments for sending signals and were installed in a variety of places including drug stores and attics. Moreover working conditions in the radio studio were exceedingly difficult. Announcers, who were generally technicians with suitable radio voices, were often forced to work in hotel rooms converted into makeshift studios and behind microphones that resembled telephones. Mechanical gramophones had to be wound up by hand during the presentation of musical programs and seldom were there rehearsals for the relatively few live shows that originated from the studio (Collins, 1953, 21, 34). In fact radio in Canada, during the early 1920s, was perceived as an extension of the platform or town hall meeting which was a favorite social occasion for families in small communities. Nearly all of the events broadcast by the private stations were local or regional happenings. Given the rustic radio technology at the time, these remote broadcasts were a burdensome undertaking. Gerry Quinney, a radio pioneer with station CKWX in Vancouver, has recalled that "upwards of one hundred and fifty pounds of heavy equipment including batteries and amplifiers had to be physically carried to the site of the broadcast" (Quinney, 1976). Still the private stations seized upon every local event of any significance to fill their broadcasting schedule.

The regulatory framework governing broadcasting in these days was designed to allow officialdom to supervise closely the astounding growth of this new form of communications. However officials in the federal Department of Marine and Fisheries, which had jurisdiction over Canadian broadcasting, were without full

knowledge of all the technical aspects of radio or its potential for altering social systems. Until 1932, there was no over-all policy for broadcasting in Canada; instead the subject was treated on an ad hoc basis with the government reacting periodically to new developments (Foster, nd, 46). Yet the department, in its various regulations, exercised considerable control over the broadcasting industry through the licensing process and eventually operated stations of its own along Canada's northern coastline to serve "trading posts, settlers, miners and missions" (PAC, Dept. of Marine and Fisheries, RG 42, vol. 1076, File 7-3-1). Moreover the federal department had recognized that radio had a national purpose, in this pioneer age, well before the Aird Commission was established in 1928.

According to the Department of Marine and Fisheries, "the value of direct communications enabling the interchange of ideas between citizens of different parts of a widespread country, such as the Dominion, is of inestimable value in maintaining a national spirit" (Memorandum, Radio Branch, 20 July 1923). The department's objective was to consolidate the existing private stations, which were faced with American competition, to help promote national survival. Broadcasting was a "service" which had undeniable advantages for the nation as a whole. It "would not be a good thing for Canada," the department argued, if "at some future date existing broadcasting stations begin to drop out [owing to] the many powerful stations to the south." It maintained that "existing arrangements whereby manufacturing companies, newspapers and others are operating broadcasting stations free of charge, cannot be expected to continue indefinitely. ...Ways and means [must

be] established whereby the ultimate consumer will pay for the services received." Thus a radio set license fee of one dollar was intended, in part, to help subsidize the private stations. However, for the most part, the operators of these stations declined to accept this form of government subsidy. In his appearance before the 1932 Special Commons Committee on Radio Broadcasting, Commander C.P. Edwards, the director of radio for the Department of Marine and Fisheries, noted that station CKY in Winnipeg, which was owned by the Manitoba government, was "the only case we have of the government paying any cash to anyone for actual broadcasting" (Minutes, Special Committee on Radio, 11 March 1932, 3). The fee on radio sets also helped to pay the salaries of radio inspectors who toured the various stations in Canada (Minutes, 11 March 1932, 5). Through the licensing system, the government was able to exercise control over the early broadcasters, even though there was no broad policy whereby radio was regarded as a medium for the cultural improvement of a mass audience.

Almost right from the beginning of broadcasting in Canada, regulators clamped tight restrictions on the industry which virtually prohibited large profits from being made. In 1922, private stations were specifically not allowed to levy any kind of toll for the services they provided by broadcasting entertainment or information programs (Allard, 1979, 13). Moreover, "indirect" advertising was permitted, only in 1928, almost ten years after broadcasting had started in Canada (Allard, 1979, 12). This form of advertising meant that a sponsor's name at the beginning of a program could be mentioned, but no details of the advertiser's

product were provided for the listener. Hence companies initially failed to see much advantage in radio as a form of advertising. As O.J. Firestone (1966, 94) has written, "radio broadcasting introduced into Canada in the early 1920s faced an uphill struggle for many years as far as its commercial achievements were concerned." Moreover advertising on radio met with some public opposition and often was criticized by publications such as **Radio Broadcast Magazine** which were designed to serve the broadcasting industry (Heighton and Cunningham, 1978, 6). Paul Rutherford (1978, 61) had noted that the early part of the twentieth century marked "the great age of consumer advertising" when "patent medicine ads boomed." But "by no means all people were seduced by the messages of the advertiser in the 1920s." Rather "advertising joined a complex of disciplines, some like religion the critic of needless consumption, that pushed people in different directions" (Rutherford, 1978, 104).

Another regulation stipulated that no radio station license could be transferred even if a broadcaster saw the chance of selling to a wealthy buyer. As Frank Foster has written, "the objective of the policy was to ensure that no commercial value was attached to a license" (Foster, II). If a broadcaster wanted to sell his station, "the seller had to surrender the license for cancellation and the buyer had to apply for a new license." This policy coupled with the fact that licenses for stations could be issued only to British subjects allowed the government to apply strict regulation to the economic aspects of the industry (Minutes, 11 March 1932, 4).

Yet even the broadcasting pioneers, who often objected to these periodic government edicts, had come to realize that there was a practical explanation for some regulations such as the requirement that stations, in the same centre, share broadcast frequencies. There was to be no simultaneous broadcasting on different radio frequencies unless specifically authorized by the Department of Marine and Fisheries. For example, in Vancouver, stations CKWX and CKMO, now CFUN, were on the same frequency. As Gerry Quinney (1976) recalled, "you couldn't keep operating anymore than a couple of hours before the batteries ran down and you had to charge them." Hence the department at least "kept the wave length live anyway."

Other regulations during this period stipulated that "mechanically operated musical instruments" were forbidden between 7:30 p.m. and midnight which meant that stations could not play phonograph records (Allard, 1979, 13). This latter regulation gave rise to considerable live programming which stations were forced to provide in the evening hours. As well "phantom" stations came into being as the Department of Marine and Fisheries tried to bring some sense of organization to the burgeoning radio industry. A "phantom" station was defined as "one which owns no physical equipment but is allotted a distinctive call signal and is licensed to operate over a station having physical equipment" (Minutes, 11 March 1932, 4). Vic George (George, 1977) has credited Commander C.P. Edwards for introducing the "phantom" technique recalling that the department had to deal with a "whole rash of different radio transmitters" that were struggling for a frequency allowance. The licensing of "phantoms" did manage to "keep

down the number of transmitters fighting for space on the air."

However, the government regulation, which accompanied the announcement on June 1st, 1928 that a Royal Commission would be appointed to examine the radio situation in Canada, clearly stymied innovation in the broadcasting industry. After this date, "every new station, every increase in power, any change made in any license" was made with the stipulation that the licensee agreed "to waive all claim for compensation in the event of nationalization" (Minutes, 18 March 1932, 105). Doctor George M. Geldert, the owner of station CKCO in Ottawa, the present day CKOY which had been established in 1924, maintained that "progress in Canadian broadcasting" had been "definitely retarded" by this regulation which made private broadcasters reluctant to purchase new equipment and expand their operations (Minutes 19 April 1932, 640). In both its licensing procedures, advertising policies and regulations governing the economics of the industry, the Department of Marine and Fisheries fully endorsed broadcasting as a non-commercial venture. This view espoused by officialdom often did not coincide with the entrepreneurial outlook of the broadcasting pioneers who tended to see several regulations as a bureaucratic nuisance. The level of programming provided by the early broadcasters should be seen, then, in the context of a rudimentary radio technology and a regulatory framework which they sometimes saw as a handicap.

Programming Formats

The tendency, on the part of some scholars, to equate the low power of the early stations with limited service has to be treated somewhat cautiously given the nature of the radio spectrum and the conditions under which the stations operated. In the 1920s, radio waves could travel great distances and be received in far away places, because there was less cluttering of the radio spectrum than exists today. The interference now caused by citizen band radios and heavy industrial equipment was virtually nonexistent. Hence a station of fifty watts could probably be heard over a greater distance, in this period, as opposed to present day receiving conditions (Weir, 1965, 19). Evidence to show the extensive signals provided by some of these "small" stations can be found in the Minutes of the 1932 Special Commons Committee on Radio Broadcasting.

Acadia University of Wolfville, Nova Scotia operated a fifty watt station with the call letters CKIC. The President of the University, Doctor F.W. Patterson, appeared before the Committee claiming that his "primary interest" in radio broadcasting was "of the educationalist" (Minutes, 1 April, 1932, 265). Under questioning from the Committee members, Doctor Patterson explained how far the station's broadcasts extended. Asked, "what points do you reach?", he replied:

We reach St. Stephen, St. Andrew's, Eastport in Maine, Saint John, as far north as Chipman; Sussex, Moncton, Amherst, practically all of Prince

Edward Island, by day time broadcasting; Truro, into New Glasgow, Dartmouth, but not Halifax except in the outskirts. The area between Truro and Halifax, and in the day time Digby and a little further, probably in around Moncton by night.

The University President went on to state that "we have only a 50 watt station" and that "one hundred watts would probably give us all the coverage we would reasonably desire." Similarly Arthur Dupont, the director of Radio Station CKAC in Montreal, recalled the history of the station noting, in the process, its extensive coverage even with relatively low power:

Radio station CKAC began operating sometime in 1922. To our knowledge, station CKAC was amongst the first three Canadian radio stations to broadcast on a fairly regular schedule. Its initial power output was rated at 500 watts. Its coverage, in those days, was much beyond what is being secured from present transmitters of equal power. This can be explained by the fact that radio stations, being few in number, were not subject to the present congestion. (Minutes, 14 April 1932, 521)

Dupont told the committee that "the coverage of CKAC included part of the Maritime provinces, Eastern Ontario and the entire Province of Quebec." Many stations were low in power, by present day broadcasting standards, but the reach of their signals was often surprisingly adequate. Moreover the operators of these stations

attempted to provide programming that was both entertaining and informative for their audiences.

It is clear from the evidence presented to the 1932 Radio Broadcasting Committee that the early private broadcasters saw radio playing an important educational role. For example, R.T. Holman, the owner of station CHGS in Summerside, Prince Edward Island, in a brief to the Committee, showed that his station provided a number of educational features including radio talks relating to "Prince Edward Island History and Folklore, Parents Educational Talks" and "General Educational Talks prepared by the faculty of Mount Allison University" (Minutes, 18 April 1932, 521). These were aired along with programs "for housewives, for rural audiences, as well as for urban listeners." Similarly Major William Borrett, the director of station CHNS in Halifax who was known as "Mr. Halifax", explained that his station also was heavily involved in educational programming. Among such features heard on CHNS were the "Half Hour French Lesson, weekly, by Professor C.H. Mercer, the Review of the Week's News by Professor H.L. Stewart, the Trans-Canada Educational Programs and the Lord Nelson Little Symphony" (Minutes, 7 April 1932, 382).

In London, radio station CJGC had started a program known as "University of the Air" in 1928. This station, which was originally established on September 20, 1922, was the third private station in Canada (Nolan, 1979, 3). CJGC was licensed to the London Free Press Printing Company whose President, at that time, was Arthur Blackburn, the father of Walter Blackburn, who later served as Chairman and Publisher of

the London Free Press and Chairman of the Board of CFPL Broadcasting (Nolan, 4). The University of Western Ontario, which had been founded in 1878, played a considerable role in the station's public service programming. University educators were heard Thursday evenings between 7:30 and 7:45 on CJGC delivering a wide range of radio lectures touching upon both practical and academic areas. For example, Fred Landon, the university's librarian, addressed a radio audience on the historical aspects of early London newspapers. According to the then President of Western, Sherwood Fox, the station charged the university only "bare expenses in order to permit [it] to give its service to the community" (PAC, File 227-9-3, 25 March 1929). CJGC, forerunner to the present day CFPL, also appears to have been the first radio station in Canada to attempt to provide its listeners with up to the minute coverage of federal election results. To report the outcome of voting on October 29, 1925, the news gathering resources of the **London Free Press** were "placed at the disposal of the radio department so that interesting and intelligent reports" were provided to "radio fans from time to time" (London Free Press, 24 Oct. 1925). The station provided periodic coverage of local, regional and national results with a constituency by constituency breakdown of Western Ontario ridings giving special attention to those where cabinet ministers were seeking re-election. While CJGC relied heavily on the **Free Press**, this style of election coverage, which set the radio format for later years, also reflected the notion held by Arthur Blackburn that the immediacy of radio "could supplement but not necessarily supplant the form of service provided by the newspaper" (Nolan, 1979, 4). His conception of radio was somewhat unconven-

tional at a time when a number of newspaper owners saw this new electronic medium as a threat to their existence. These early broadcasting efforts relating to educational and cultural radio presentations, and to programming of a more general nature, presaged the Canadian Radio League's lofty objectives for the medium.

The Radio League's claim that these broadcasters could not provide "an adequate coast - to - coast system for relaying continental and British programmes" is clearly open to question when early radio-network service is examined (R. B. Bennett papers, Dec. 1930, 389123, M-1314). Certainly "chains" or "hookups" were exceedingly difficult during the first decade of radio broadcasting. The high cost of renting transmission lines and the leasing of station time, an expensive proposition, were two of the negative factors that prevented the establishment of networks on a permanent basis, although there were numerous temporary arrangements made for network broadcasting. During this pioneer period, the Canadian National Railways played an important role and, towards the end of the 1920s, private broadcasters began to establish networks on their own.

Network Radio

The story of Henry Thornton and the Canadian National Railways' role in the Diamond Jubilee network broadcast of 1927 has been described in other scholarly studies (Peers, 1969, 22 - 27; Weir, 1965, 5 - 18). Sir Henry has frequently been applauded for using radio to promote national consciousness in Canada, although it should be recalled that the CNR radio network was mainly comprised of privately-owned

stations. At no time did the CNR own more than three broadcasting outlets. These were CNRO in Ottawa, CNRA in Moncton and in Vancouver station CNRV (Ashcroft, 1931). The CNR often leased time on more than a dozen private stations across Canada under a "phantom" arrangement. In other words, the railway was allowed to use its own call letters on the stations it did not own, while its programs were sent on a network basis (Carlyle, 1 Oct. 1976). Public broadcasting enthusiasts generally have overlooked the extensive program origination by private stations which belonged to the CNR network. While the railway had "blazed the trail for chain broadcasting in Canada" with its coast to coast radio - telephone lines, it relied greatly on private broadcasters who fed programs from centres where no CNR station was located (Ashcroft, 15 Oct. 1929). For example, station CKNC in Toronto, which had been originally owned by Eveready Battery and later by the Canadian National Carbon Company, claimed to have "originated more chain broadcasts for Canadian manufacturers than any station in Canada" (Minutes, 20 April 1932, 677). In a memorandum to the 1932 Radio Broadcasting Committee, the station management made this observation:

It is a rather startling fact that CKNC, a so - called low - powered station, produced and originated in its own studios and broadcast over its own transmitter in the capacity of a key station, more chain programs than any one of the high - powered stations in Canada, and practically as many chain programs as were originated by all of the high - powered stations combined. (Minutes, 20 April 1932, 677)

While the CNR was the true radio network pioneer, the Canadian Pacific Railway entered the radio field with great enthusiasm in 1920 when the national carrier-current system of the privately owned company was completed. The CPR network eventually comprised twenty-one stations across Canada but, unlike the CNR, none of them was owned by the railway company (Bennett papers, Jan 1931, 389176, M-1314). CPR fed programs nationally over telegraph lines and offered them to any private station provided that the local broadcaster paid the transmission cost from the CP location in his community to the radio studio. The railway had established new radio studios in the Royal York Hotel in Toronto and began broadcasting such popular musical programs as the "Musical Crusaders" which introduced a group of musicians who were making a cruise around the world on the Empress of Australia (Canadian Pacific Corporate Archives). The programs, which were aired on Sunday afternoons between 4:15 and 4:45 eastern standard time, were written by Stanley Maxted, a well known Canadian tenor. The "Musical Crusaders" were heard not only nationwide in Canada but also over a network of stations in the Eastern and Middle-western States affiliated with station WJZ in Newark, New Jersey. The cities in the United States that received these broadcasts included New York, Rochester, Detroit, Chicago, Cincinnati, St. Louis, Kansas City, Lincoln, Pittsburgh, Baltimore, Boston and Springfield. Other programming provided by the CPR included the celebrated ensemble known as the "English Singers" who, on November 21, 1930, gave their first radio program on the North American continent as part of the railway's attempt to foster the development of music in Canada.

One of the earliest radio chains that historians, for the most part, have tended to overlook was the Trans-Canada Broadcasting Company managed by R.W. Ashcroft. In 1929, Ashcroft claimed credit for "practically all of the pioneer work in connection with commercial chain broadcasting in Canada" that had been done "during the past year" (Bennett, 14 Oct. 1929, 389142, M-1314). This network, whose flagship station CKGW in Toronto had been established on March 4, 1928, was in operation for five years until 1933 (Minutes, 5 April 1932, 329). The network broadcasts provided by this chain of private stations included the ceremonies marking the opening of Parliament in 1930; the first Christmas day message of King George, in 1931; the opening of the Indian Round Table Conference on November 12, 1930; several addresses of the Prince of Wales; and a series of educational broadcasts under the auspices of the National Council of Education. Ashcroft personally paid the university professors who presented these broadcasts on the Trans-Canada Network (Minutes, 14 May 1932, 649). He also made possible "the admission into Canada of the first U.S. commercial musical program ever put on the air from a Canadian station" (Bennett, 5 Oct. 1929, 389142, M-1314). As well, during its first year of operation, the network "staged programs in Canada and broadcast them from coast to coast in the U.S."

Another pioneer of network broadcasting was Vic George who had joined station CFCF in 1930. The Depression had a staggering effect on the radio industry and, in 1931, the CNR had decided to close its radio department. Because of his previous years with the CNR station in Moncton, George was aware that Canadian National had high

quality carrier-current facilities linking most Canadian cities east of Winnipeg. Moreover, the stations owned by both the CNR and private interests were striving to improve their programming at a time when the industry was strained financially. George soon proposed a new network arrangement which comprised stations in London, Hamilton, Toronto, Ottawa, Montreal, Moncton, Fredericton and Halifax. Listeners in all of these Canadian cities were able to hear the programs that were exchanged among the stations in this "co-operative network" from early 1931 to 1933 (Bambrick interview, George, 21 Jan. 1977). However, in this latter year, the newly established Canadian Radio Broadcasting Commission, as George has explained, "expropriated our mutual network without so much as a thank you." The establishment of the CRBC in November, 1932, marked the end of the pioneer era in Canadian broadcasting and the birth of the public system. Despite the efforts of the private broadcasters, the Aird Commission, the Canadian Radio League and the architects of the 1932 broadcasting legislation showed an eagerness to harness radio and make it serve what they saw as more noble, national purposes. Still the CRBC had to rely on the private stations for the distribution of its programs as did its successor the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation which was established in 1936 (Peers, 1969, 156 - 163, 241 - 242). Thus the stations operated by the broadcasting pioneers, who had laid the basis for the broadcasting system in Canada, continued to be a dominant force in the broadcasting industry for the next two decades.

Conclusion

The pioneer years of Canadian broadcasting between 1918 and 1932 saw broadcaster-businessmen establish radio service on both a regional and national basis. For more than a dozen years, and in the face of close government supervision, the entrepreneurs, who had chosen to experiment with this new medium, had to deal with a technology that was not only often misunderstood but also one that was quite cumbersome and unreliable. As a result, the art of programming had to give way to the mechanics of broadcasting in this period.

During the early 1920s, in particular, stations struggled simply to maintain their broadcast signal. Yet even with these kinds of technical handicaps, the range of program service, in the context of early broadcast conditions, was commendable.

Toward the end of the 1920s, the private broadcasters were successful in forming networks as their mastery of the technology became more proficient and as the transportation industry in Canada got more involved in radio. Given the temper of the times as the Depression approached, it is surprising that these entrepreneurs even continued in such a risky business.

The popular notion that all private broadcasters have traditionally operated profitable businesses can be dispelled quickly when this early era is examined. The industry was characterized by numerous bankruptcies and changes of ownership. This assumption, that success was inevitable, has been nurtured through an over-emphasis on the career of Roy Thomson and his

remark that a television broadcasting permit was "like having a license to print your own money" (Special Senate Committee Report, 1970, 1:47). Some broadcasters, such as Thomson, were more successful than others. For example, in London, Ontario, the Blackburn family prospered but three other stations, which started early operations, were forced to close down during the 1920s. With the government overseeing the economic aspects of the broadcasting business, the private owners were forced to search long and hard to find their place in the Canadian economy. The appointment of the Aird Commission in 1928 made their position even more untenable as the spectre of nationalization now hung over them. Finally, the 1932 Broadcasting Act, which introduced public broadcasting to Canada, made the CRBC not only a broadcaster but the governing agency of all broadcasting with the power to regulate the private stations as to programs and advertising.

That private broadcasters operated stations with a crude radio technology and under the watchful eye of government officials, during this pioneer period, to provide programs that had sizeable Canadian audiences is an historical development that officialdom today sometimes seems reluctant to acknowledge. These stations were in existence a full fourteen years before the formulation of a comprehensive federal policy which had at its core the notion that national radio should serve as a vehicle for cultural uplift. As subsequent years have shown, the introduction of publicly owned radio could not alter automatically the fact that listeners had responded favorably to the Canadian and foreign programming provided on the stations and networks established by Canada's pioneers.

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