

The development of canadian television

Sociology



As the twenties came to a close, Canadian political elite became increasingly concerned that the commercial messages and entertainment-driven values from American radio stations that freely drifted across the border were eroding Canadian culture. The most popular radio show in Canada was the American produced situation comedy *Amos n' Andy*. In 1929 the Liberal government of Mackenzie King commissioned three men to study and report on the state of broadcasting in the country, beginning a relationship between the state and the media that has not weakened since. The three were Sir John Aird, a banker, Charles Bowman, a journalist with the *Ottawa Citizen*, and Augustin Frigon, an engineer at L'Ecole Polytechnique in Montreal. The commissioners studied virtually every form of radio broadcasting in existence during the year of the investigation.

By the time Aird delivered his report, the Liberals were out of the office and a new Conservative Prime Minister, R. B. Bennett was in control. It was up to Bennett to decide which form broadcasting would take in Canada. Like King, Bennett was deeply concerned that American influence, especially its views on liberalism and republicanism, would soon dominate Canadian thinking. But in spite of his own concerns, he did not opt for a pure system of public broadcasting. Instead, his government founded the Canadian Radio Broadcasting Commission (CRBC) with a mandate to both build and operate stations and to produce programming for its own outlets, as well as the private sector. The concept proved unworkable.

Badly injured politically by the Great Depression, Bennett was out of office in 1935, and King returned with a vision for a stronger and more Canadian oriented public broadcasting system. The King government essentially threw out Bennett's legislation and created the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation <https://assignbuster.com/the-development-of-canadian-television/>

(CBC) in 1936. The CBC was to own and operate stations, produce programming for both itself and the private sector, but, above all, it was to act as a regulator for the private sector which remained subservient, but intact.

Although the CBC was designed to act as an outlet for Canadian ideas and Canadian programming, radio dials remained tuned to stations south of the border. In fact, the CBC itself carried a significant amount of U. S. programming to help pay its bills. American influence also extended to the stage, film, dance, and music worlds, as well as to publications on a myriad of themes. As the Second World War came to a close, government officials began to realize that the CBC alone could not encourage or preserve what "produced in Canada" culture existed. As a consequence, the government called upon Vincent Massey, brother of the actor Raymond Massey, to conduct an inquiry into the state of the arts in Canada. In 1951 the Massey commission concluded with the now-familiar "the Americans are taking us over" theme. The commission concentrated its investigation on the state of the arts but did note that newspapers were critical actors in the dissemination of knowledge in any given country. In reference to radio, Massey concluded that the medium had three critical functions: to inform, to educate, and to entertain.

In spite of Massey's warnings, American influence in Canada continued unabated. This was assisted in part by the 1948 arrival of television in the United States, four years prior to the opening of the first Canadian station in Montreal. Following a pattern established in radio some three decades previously, television dials in Canadian cities began to lock on to U. S. channels. It was hardly a rebellion against nationalism. In fact, when the dust

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began to settle over the question as to whether loyal Canadians would reject American broadcasting, the issue had really become one of variety. It remained to be seen whether or not the CBC should remain the dominant provider of broadcasting products in Canada. The answer was a firm no. Yet another commission had been looking into the business of broadcasting in Canada. Robert Fowler delivered his report to the government on March 15, 1957. It was here that the principle of a single broadcasting system consisting of both public and private participants first saw the light of day. Although Fowler felt that private broadcasters, in general, had to be forced to deliver a good product or lose their respective licenses, he also conceded that the private sector, in spite of having existed in a subordinate position for twenty years, had refused to go away. To this end, Fowler added one more condition to the purpose of broadcasting, essentially creating a vehicle for advertising. His most dramatic recommendation was the removal of the regulatory powers of the CBC, which he felt should be seated in a neutral body. In 1958, the federal government acted on his proposal and created the first independent regulatory agency, the Board of Broadcast Governors. Within months, the new agency opened the way for private, independent television stations to take to the air. It was the beginning of the alternate development in Canadian television which would see the emergence of Canadian Television as the country's first privately owned and operated system.