

Canadian Broadcasting: The Challenge of Change
Hoskins, Colin and McFadyen, Stuart. University of Alberta. 1986.

This volume contains papers by 20 participants in the 'Challenge for Change Symposium' sponsored by the University of Alberta and the ACCESS network in Alberta. Members of the Federal Task Force on Broadcasting Policy also participated in sessions on four major issues: the application of emerging technologies to meet national and regional needs; possibilities for restructuring regulatory and other incentives within the broadcast system; changes in regional and local television programming policies; and provisions for radio and television programming in languages other than Canada's two official languages.

The first set of papers is concerned with the ways that the legal environment can suppress or stimulate innovative application of new technologies. One author calls attention to the often "complete failure of legal techniques" (p 2) in the face of innovative technologies, another to the need to redefine broadcasting to include all the ways of providing in-home entertainment and educational services and the removal of restrictions on the use of broadcast systems that use different technologies. The absence of regulatory decisions is pointed to as a factor preventing the introduction of, for example, high definition television, multichannel sound and multipoint distribution, and AM Stereo. These authors tend to argue for revision of existing rules and legislation, for transparency and clarification and greater freedom for the development of innovative applications.

Existing regulatory practice and incentive structures created within the broadcast industry are generally found to be misguided, contradictory, and ineffective. The compilers of this volume, Hoskins and McFadyen, point to the stark reality of the contradiction between programming objectives embedded in the Broadcasting Act, 1968 and the fact that "it is not reasonable to expect private broadcasters to sacrifice the interests of their shareholders for some higher public interest." (p 15) The removal of content regulations and the introduction of subsidies directly tied to specific programming categories are presented as pragmatic solutions to stimulate more Canadian production. Robert Babe points to the often forgotten fact that restrictions imposed on broadcasters in fact create opportunities for others to participate in creative programme production. He advocates competitive licence renewal to ensure that broadcasters meet licence conditions. Others call for the creation of "pockets of imbalance in favour of Canadian programs" (p 28) and continuing support for independent programme production.

Papers addressed to the third issue, regional and local programme production, are united insofar as the need for greater opportunity is recognised but policy prescriptions range from greater regulatory intervention to the de-linking of public and private sector broadcasting. Rowland Lorimer and Jean McNulty stress the results of failure to address this issue. "To set a broadcast production policy which maintains the present dominance of program production in central Canada will inevitably tie regional activity to American industry." (p 32) They call for changes in the conditions of access and participation in community cable channels and limited restructuring to stimulate programme exchange and create incentives for independent regional and local production.

The finding that CBC owned and operated stations have costs approximately 30-233 per cent higher than private CBC affiliate stations (Stanley Liebowitz, p 43) points to the inefficiency of public enterprise as a factor in the failure of the CBC to fulfill its mandate. The study, which is criticised in another paper on methodological grounds, illustrates the gulf between the policy options that follow from evaluation of broadcasting within a narrow economic perspective and one that tries to account for broader social, economic and political concerns. Other papers on the programming theme present alternative network structures, call for the CBC to relinquish all claims to Canadian advertising dollars, and emphasise the role of community television in responding to local interests.

The final set of papers call for the entrenchment of aboriginal-language broadcasting in revisions to the Broadcast Act to remove uncertainty created by the need to argue for the renewal of federal native broadcast support

programme (Gail Valaskakis, Jeff Bear). Guaranteed access to networks and regulations requiring aboriginal programme distribution are key areas of concern. Other papers in this group call for a clear legislative mandate to support multi-cultural programming.

The papers in this volume are presented in the form of briefs. They clearly are intended to advocate policy positions to the members of the Task Force. Their value lies in the exposure of a spectrum of views on resolutions to problems that plague the Canadian broadcasting sector. In most cases, the implications for other interest groups and realistic possibilities for implementation are not considered. Perhaps not surprisingly, problems confronting Canadian broadcasting policy are presented under the shadow of U.S. broadcasting, technical change and the inevitable clash of social, political and economic values. The Federal Task Force's synthesis of views reflects another attempt at reconciliation that may open possibilities for the survival of a distinctively Canadian broadcast environment.

Robin E. Mansell, Administrator
Committee for Information, Computers and Communication
Organization for Economic Corporation and Development

The Media Society: Basic Issues and Controversies
Ross A. Eaman, Butterworths, Toronto and Vancouver, 1987.

Although Canadian scholars have made valuable contributions to communications research, few have turned their attention to the problems caused by the dearth of good introductory textbooks reflecting the Canadian experience.

It is with particular joy, therefore, that we welcome Carleton University Professor Ross Eaman's new book, The Media Society.

It's compact, to be sure, but it packs into its 188 pages more than sufficient material to fuel most introductory courses in mass communication. And it is obvious that the material has been successfully test-driven in Eaman's own classes. Despite the need for a little sharper copy editing, the book is logically organized and clearly written, so that while everyone may not agree with his entire selection of topics or with his emphases, they are still likely to find the book more useful than anything else currently available.

Fortuitously, I was able to use Eaman's text, hot off the press, for a summer course I was teaching, and I can report that almost without exception, my students enthusiastically endorsed this opinion. For most of them, it was a new and thrilling experience to use a text with up-to-date Canadian references rather than the usual American or British data. Furthermore, they found particularly praiseworthy the extensive, and carefully selected bibliographies at the end of each chapter.

Receiving a rather more mixed reaction was the "double polarity" methodology Eaman employs in each chapter to highlight four major schools of thought of intellectual positions" on each of the issues he raises. It is a rigid system, indeed, and sometimes openly shows the strain under which it is made to work. Most frequently, as though the author kept running out of gas, it is poor old Position D which gets short shrift, being left undeveloped or dismissed as a variation of one of the preceding three positions.

On the whole, however, the students did agree with Eaman that, used judiciously, the method can clarify sometimes abstruse distinctions and that it certainly stimulates discussion and debate.

One particularly noticeable lacuna results from the failure in Chapter One (What is Communication?) to develop the section on semiotics (Position D, of course). The subject is given a hurried overview and there is little to suggest that semiotics provides one of the two major ways of thinking about communications. This in turn precludes serious examination of this form of analysis in the discussion of news in the following chapter.

In Chapter Three, dealing with press-state relationships, Socialist theory (Position D, again!) suffers from a truncated presentation. In fact, there is throughout the book a seeming reluctance to deal more than cursorily with Marxist or other socialist critiques of media. And in this chapter, too, the