

Hardin, Herschel. **Closed Circuits: The Sellout of Canadian Television.** Toronto: Douglas and McIntyre Ltd., 1985.

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This is an important book. The message it carries and the impact it is making across Canada attest to that fact. It is a partisan, passionate, polemic on the history of Canadian television over the past fifteen years.

It was during these years that Hardin added to his credentials of playwright, political science lecturer, broadcaster, columnist, and critic, those of founding president of the Association for Public Broadcasting in British Columbia, and general manager of Capital Cable Co-operative. In these latter two roles Hardin became a participant and an observer in the Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission orchestrated competition for television station and cable system licences. Hardin and his colleagues, for all their exhaustive briefs and applications for a community based public TV station and a co-op cable company, came up losers with the CRTC.

This book is a cry from the heart. It conjures up the image of Paddy Chayevsky's character Howard Beale, the TV news anchorman in the film **Network**. Beale wanted everyone to give expression to their utter frustration with an entrenched system of compromise and hypocrisy by shouting, "I'm mad as hell and I'm not going to take it anymore."

Hardin has expanded on and offered new evidence to support his conviction, initially set out in his 1974 book **A Nation Unaware** that:

No other phenomenon illustrates better the market contradiction between Canada and the United States than the unremitting struggle for public broadcasting in Canada. No other phenomenon has been so indigenous to Canada. And, in the ideological colony, no other phenomenon has been so maligned and abused. We have loved and hated our own children most.

Although this book deals with specific television station and network licensing cases its focus goes beyond broadcast policy. Taken in total, Hardin's sardonic and thoroughly damning indictment of the broadcast regulatory process is meant to be an expose of the hypocrisy and degeneration of public administration and government. The villain of the piece is the CRTC and its first chairman, Pierre Juneau.

Juneausque arabesques now filled the broadcasting-politics stage, keeping attention off the only issue that counted: the need to expand Canadian television on the public side. The CRTC was not primarily a regulatory agency. It was a diversionary agency. (page 44)

Three major issues surface through the book: (1) the question of expanding Canadian television via commercial or non-commercial stations/networks; (2) the need to counterbalance the power and bias of television networks (CBC, CTV, Global) based in southern Ontario; (3) the continued underwriting of television via advertising, or as Hardin puts it: "undesirable and wasteful, cost-exorbitant propaganda." He deals at length with this latter issue.

For Canada, noncommercial financing of television is the only method that makes any sense. The country cannot afford the waste of commercial television.

Now the truth is out: The commercial financing of television in Canada has nothing to do with practical financial considerations of efficiency. It has to do with political and social power and its use of myth. The users of vendors' propaganda and their advertising agencies impose on the country the financing of broadcasting they want, at a considerable overhead cost to the economy. (page 68)

For all its shortcomings, eg., personal bias, no footnotes, no index, etc., *Closed Circuits* is an important book for the heat it has generated and the light it has shed on Canadian broadcasting. It will offer special insights to those concerned with the several areas of current debate, eg., culture and free trade talks, the report of the federal Task Force on Broadcasting, and the proposed new Telecommunications Act.