

public hearings, major conferences, and special Canadian event coverage. Further good use of satellite time would be weekend replays of highlights in House proceedings – Question Period, budget speeches, Throne Speeches, debates, private member speeches and bills.

Televised information on the network could take the simple form of printed material much like existing billboard type cable channels. This might include:

- an introduction to every MP and what he/she does;
- how to reach your MP;
- committee schedules;

- federal information services;
- seating plans and House calendars;
- lists of ministers, critics, etc.

There are many pay television and specialty channels available to Canadians but none more devoted to live Canadian information programming, with 100% Canadian content. A fully used television network would be very cost-effective in terms of dollars spent per potential viewer and especially in terms of increased public interest and awareness.

With its magical ten-metre dish and huge nation-wide signal, the CBC's Parliamentary Television Network can become a most effective vehicle for relating Parliament to all Canadians. ■

Parliament and Television (2)

Robert Anderson

In Canada, we have had House of Commons debates on television for eight years. Our installation has served as a model for many countries which have sent representatives to Ottawa to see how we do it. It has been a success but the cameras have been too restricted in their coverage, resulting in a distorted view of what is going on in the most important room in the nation. The work of the committees of the House has been almost entirely neglected, even though the original motion to broadcast included the committees.

The McGrath Committee on Reform of the House of Commons has recommended a review of the television coverage of the debates and the televising of committees. There is a larger question which has not yet been addressed: what is to be done about the Parliamentary television network. Except when the House is in session, it sits there unused.

Concern also exists about the audience for Parliamentary television. Short excerpts are used on network newscasts and Question Period gets a good play, but the full coverage of House debates, which is what the Parliamentary network consists of, is available only on cable. The cable systems are not required by the Canadian-Radio Television and Telecommunications Commission to carry any of it. One can argue that Parliament should be available anywhere in the country where there is a cable system with the channel capacity.

First, we are going to have to decide to whom the "CBC Parliamentary Television Network" belongs. The CBC pays for it and in fiscal year 1984 it cost the CBC three million dollars for the two satellite channels, one English, one French. The commentator introductions, which require studios and staff, last year cost the

CBC \$665,000. That is heavy going for a national broadcasting service which is already having to cope with cuts imposed by a cost-conscious government. The CBC pays for the network but has no control whatsoever over it. This was made quite clear to them when they announced recently that to save money, they were going to do away with one of the satellite channels and would use only one commentator doing the introductions in both languages. The shouts of Members of Parliament about interference with Parliament's network made the CBC reconsider.

With few exceptions, efforts of the CBC to put the unused time on this network to use have been discouraged by the CRTC which appears to be suspicious that CBC is trying to sneak in CBC II, a second network on cable that CRTC refused to license several years ago. With such formidable opposition, what is CBC to do? One thing they could do to save money is to leave the filming of the Parliamentary commentators to Parliament's own television service. They could take this on quite easily and much less expensively. Parliament owns and operates all the broadcasting facilities within its buildings. The network begins when the signal leaves the buildings, where CBC takes it over and gets it via satellite to those cable systems that have ground reception facilities.

If the Parliamentary television network is to be put to further use as a public affairs network, who would programme it and where would the money come from? In the United States, an enterprising entrepreneur, Brian Lamb, having access to the newly available gavel to gavel coverage of the House of Representatives and to the hearings of congressional committees, persuaded a group of cable companies to pay the costs of a cable network. He named it C-SPAN, the Cable Satellite Public Affairs Network, a 24 hour service of public affairs and congressional coverage.

The cable systems pay C-SPAN three cents a month per subscriber for the service, which operates on a very slender budget.

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Brian Lamb, president of C-SPAN hosts popular C-SPAN "call in" program with guest, Barbara Bush, wife of Vice-President Bush. (Ankers Capitol Photograph)



They claim to have over twenty million subscribers.

In Canada there is not a chance of the cable systems volunteering financial support. The CRTC could require cable systems to carry the Parliamentary network and even to pay something for it, perhaps by allowing nominal rate increases to the cable systems. It appears that CBC will have to go on footing the bill to get the signal up to the satellite and down to the cable systems. Even if this is the case, adding public affairs programmes to the network would cost money that CBC does not have. It is difficult to see how a private organization could find the money, even if it could keep costs down the way C-SPAN does. A private organization here might be able to offer the same kind of programming as C-SPAN, but it is doubtful whether the CBC would want to. C-SPAN claims to operate on a budget of five and half million dollars a year. They broadcast 8,760 hour a year, which is as many hours as there are in a year. The House of Representatives and congressional hearings coverage takes up about 1,440 of those hours. The rest is filled with public affairs programmes. In Canada, even with the added coverage of committees of the House, we will have about the same excess time on the network as C-SPAN fills. Parliament cannot become a programmer, except

for the inevitable expansion of introductory and explanatory commentary to make the House and committee coverage more understandable to the audience.

We need a public affairs network incorporated into the Parliamentary television network and it will have to be run either by the CBC or by some new body like C-SPAN's non-profit corporation. The CBC could expect rough weather from the direction of Parliament, some of whose Members might again take umbrage at what they would probably regard as another attempt to invade "Parliament's" network. Relations between CBC and Parliament have never been very chummy. It would probably need some intermediary influence to keep the peace.

For a private organization working as C-SPAN does, it would take extraordinary ingenuity, particularly to find the money to run the operation. Canadian public affairs material is there to be covered and the value to Canadians indisputable.

C-SPAN is, with CRTC approval, available to Canadian cable systems and already at least one system in the Toronto area carries it. It is time we made use of our own cable network for Canadian affairs. ■