

Public Trustee of the Canadian Air

IN the face of financial difficulties, massive competition from U.S. radio, and the usual spate of listener criticism, Canada's Broadcasting Corporation stands sturdily upright and gets on with the job, says the writer of this article, a former "Listener" staff member. The CBC, he affirms, is not afraid of being funny, serious, different, or receptive to new ideas.

THE Canadian Broadcasting Corporation is one of the few radio concerns on the North American Continent which does not operate with one eye on the sponsor and the other on the indispensable Hooper ratings of popularity with listeners. Such a rarity is naturally up against a good deal of opposition, both from inside and outside Canada. The American radio networks, loaded with star shows and larded with singing commercials, lean over the border with all the weight of a barely suspended avalanche. The privately-owned Canadian stations, which are not yet allowed to form networks, pour out streams of entertainment and advertising, sometimes as much as twenty-four hours a day. The booming bass of the North American theme song Free Enter-

prise drowns any tentative whisper from a publicly-owned Corporation that broadcasting may have other possibilities besides those two which have already been thoroughly explored; entertaining the consumer and persuading him to buy.

Taking this opposition into consideration therefore, the first questions that occur to the radio-minded visitor to Canada are: Does anyone listen to the CBC, and if so, does it have any influence? The answer to both these questions is yes. In fact, it is yes on both sides of the border, a fact which encourages CBC officials who read letters sent in by American listeners.

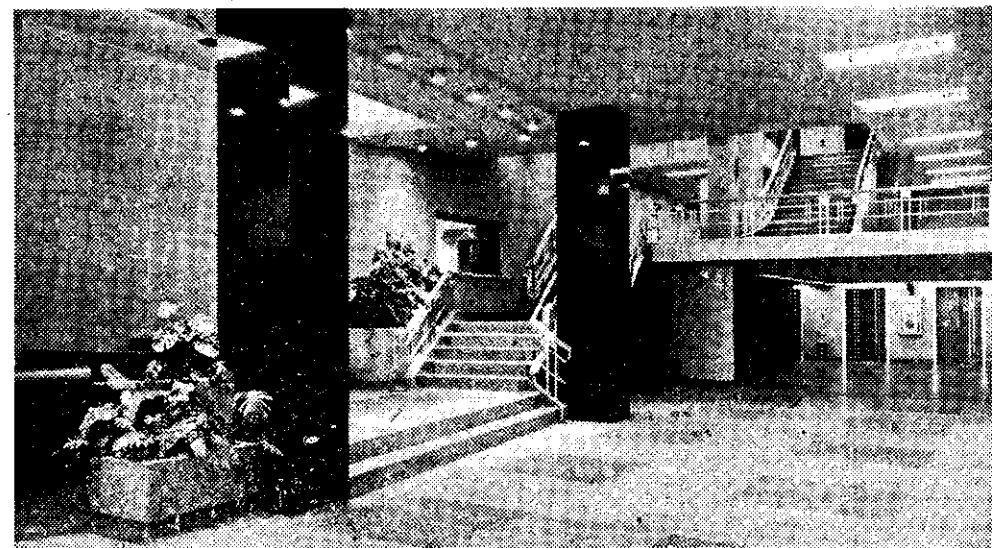
The CBC was born on November 2, 1936, taking over the functions of the three-man Canadian Radio Broadcasting Commission, which had just been legislated out of existence after a rather groping life of four and a half years. Before this twilight period there had been mostly darkness, confusion and static, with the number of receiving sets increasing rapidly and their owners, each of whom had a vote, clamouring loudly for an improvement in conditions. Licences to operate broadcasting stations had been granted private bodies of widely differing complexion, and the Government seemed to feel that the contentious job of regulating these bodies should be given to a thoroughly non-political organisation. The Commission was the first effort in this direction, the CBC the second.

One authority has defined the CBC as a public trustee rather than a government corporation. It is established by statute, but within the broad boundaries determined by the statute it operates freely without reference to any government department.

"It is," says this authority, "dependent for sanction both to the elected



The New Radio-Canada Building in Montreal—an artist's impression



THE spacious lobby of the Radio-Canada Building, with its marble columns, terrazzo floor and walls of mahogany veneer and plastic. ABOVE left: A. D. Dunton, reappointed this year for a 10-year term, as Governor and Chairman of the CBC

representatives of the nation and the broad moral sanction of the people themselves. It performs a combined operational and regulatory function in its guardianship of a national monopoly."

The CBC has always struggled to maintain its financial independence. Rather than accept appropriations it borrows from the Government and pays back loans from its two main sources of revenue; license fees and the sale of air time. Since sponsorship contains a threat to independence, although in a different way from reliance on direct appropriation, sponsored programmes are limited to 20 per cent of the whole.

The CBC has also defended itself from political interference with the integrity of its news broadcasts, so far successfully. Speaking in broad, tactful generalisations, CBC men will say that there was a time during the war when they felt particular pressure over the presentation of news. The Corporation, which strongly approves of its news broadcasts, presented a united front against the pressure. After sounds like thunder had been heard for some little while the pressure gradually eased, and CBC news broadcasts continued to be straight news.

Operating on a strictly limited budget the News Service does a sober, well-presented job. It

seems to be able to summon a considered, clear cut, individual opinion from any portion of the globe, including New Zealand, a dot on the map unknown to most inhabitants of the North American Continent. Its correspondents are encouraged to remain uninfluenced by sudden swirls of emotion, and continue to call a spade a spade even if a Congressional Investigating Committee shouts loudly that the implement is really a hammer and sickle.

Because of its freedom from political interference it should not be thought that the CBC is an autocratic body quite outside the control of the Legislature. As in the case of Canadian National Railways, the Government will not produce in the House details of internal management, but the CBC may properly be investigated by Parliamentary Committees, and this occurs frequently. Accounts and memoranda are inspected and officials called to answer questions. Nor is there any gag on general Parliamentary debates on the CBC. Members of the Opposition parties give their opinions as pungently as writers to the newspapers' correspondence columns.

Networks and Landlines

The CBC runs three networks: Trans-Canada, Dominion and French. Anyone used to a small country with one standard time throughout would find Canadian network operations complicated. The French network needs little explanation. It operates mainly in Quebec, and its programmes are intended primarily for French Canadians. The other two networks are English language. Trans-Canada is on most of the day, Dominion only in the evenings. The CBC owns only a proportion of the