

thus far conceived its political and critical project in rather limited, and increasingly unproductive, terms.

Reviewed by: William Straw
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Foundations, Alan Plaunt and The Early Days of CBC Radio
Michael Nolan
CBC Enterprises, 1986
Toronto, Ontario

This book is very aptly named, for it was Alan Plaunt, more than any other individual, who set the philosophical and organizational foundations of the CBC and its progenitor, the Canadian Radio Broadcasting Commission.

Plaunt's pivotal role in the genesis of public broadcasting in Canada was initially set out by Michael Nolan as his doctoral study for the University of Western Ontario where today Nolan teaches at the Graduate School of Journalism. CBC Enterprises published Nolan's work along with several other books in the fall of 1986 in celebration of **CBC's 50 years of public broadcasting service**. The 162 page narrative is enhanced by its thorough footnoting and seven pages of reference sources on Canadian broadcasting history.

Nolan's study is particularly detailed with regard to Plaunt's English-French family background, his education, (straight Cs at the University of Toronto and only third class honours at Oxford), his politics, his friends, the forces that shaped his beliefs, the several causes he gave his energies to, his contradictory personality, and his extraordinary organizational skills.

During his two years at Oxford (1927-29), Plaunt was a keen observer of the BBC in its first decade under the dominating leadership

of John Reith. Plaunt became a believer in Reith's approach to state-owned development of radio with its underlying philosophy that broadcasting's public service potential was too great to permit it to become a commercially oriented mass medium.

Although a great admirer of the fledgling BBC, Plaunt returned to Canada in 1929 anti-British, anti-imperialistic, anti-war, and passionately resolved that Canada must do everything possible to assert its own unique culture and nationhood.

Plaunt gave his energy and financial support to a number of organizations such as the League for Social Reconstruction, the New Canada Movement, and The Canadian Institute of International Affairs. But it was the struggle for public broadcasting that dominated his life in the 11 years from 1930 until his death in 1941 at age 37. Nolan provides a detailed chronology of these years which seem to fall into three distinct periods.

The first period, 1930-32, deals with Plaunt meeting Graham Spry in June, 1930, their launching of the Canadian Radio League, and their successful Canada-wide lobbying for public broadcasting culminating in the creation of the Canadian Radio Broadcasting Commission in 1932 by the Conservative government of R.B. Bennett.

The second period 1932-36, as described by Nolan in part:

His presentation before the parliamentary committees of 1934 and 1936, his revival of the league after most of his colleagues had pursued other interests, and his unremitting, backstage lobbying of parliamentarians and political leaders such as Mackenzie King during this period eventually found expression in the 1936 Broadcasting Act, which created the present-day Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (p. 177).

Plaunt's final period as a foundation builder of public broadcasting was 1936 to 1941. It was during this time that Plaunt served on CBC's first

Board of Governors and provided a passionate and dominating presence. Plaunt resigned from the Board in 1941 over his conviction that the Board was allowing the CBC to fall under the control of the King government during the war.

Nolan ends his book by linking Plaunt's concerns for CBC's creative freedom to similar concerns being voiced today:

Indeed, a number of the misgivings Plaunt had about the CBC, which were contained in his 1939 Report on Organization and Personnel, were reflected in the 1982 Report of the Federal Cultural Policy Review Committee. The Applebert study underlined the lack of "creative initiative and intellectual leadership" among the personnel in CBC television and singled out the CBC's "tradition of secretiveness" and problems of "bureaucratic inertia." Moreover, the report stressed the need to shield the CBC "from political control" (p. 178).

This first rate study of Plaunt is a reminder of the larger task of scholarship that remains. Serious studies must be written about the other builders of Canadian broadcasting such as Graham Spry, Davidson Dunton, Alphonse Quimet, Spencer Caldwell, and Pierre Juneau.

The unfinished task of Canadian broadcasting historical scholarship has been thrown into relief in recent years by the development of three stream of popular "history" books on Canadian broadcasting.

One stream is made up of "personalized histories" such as Sandy Stewart's two books, Here's Looking at Us, A Personal History of Television in Canada, and From Coast to Coast, A Personal History of Radio in Canada; Warner Troyer's Sound and Fury, An Anecdotal History of Canadian Broadcasting, and Bill McNeil and Morris Wolfe's Signing on, The Birth of Radio in Canada, an oral history made up of the recollections of 125 radio pioneers.

A second stream includes books by, or about, high profile radio and television stars such as Barbara Frum, Foster Hewitt, Knowlton Nash, Peter Trueman, and Tommy Hunter.

A third stream of popular broadcasting "history" are the newly emerging books on radio and television programs such as "Man Alive," "As It Happens," "Seven Days," "Front Page Challenge," "Morningside," "Connections," and "Voice of the Pioneer."

Popular histories have a role to play and are important, but Nolan's book reminds us not to lose sight of the critical importance of well-researched and scholarly books on our Canadian broadcasting heritage.

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