

what's happening

COMMUNITY ACCESS

London, Ontario

NFB in collaboration with the University, youth groups, citizens committees and local Indians has participated in a large amount of local and community programming with the Cable Company, the president of which is Mr. Jarman who has been inviting citizen participation for some time.

Thunder Bay, Ontario

A Thunder Bay citizens production unit is providing one evening's programming a week. The programmes are made at the request of local groups. In addition, the Lakehead Board of Education now has its own cable channel and its own studio connected to the Cable Company's head end and will shortly be originating live and taped programming of both an educational and community type.

Fergus, Ontario

Local talent has been given an outlet here five nights a week over the past two years.

North Bay, Ontario

The NFB distribution representative is now meeting with leading citizens to discuss ways in which citizen access to cable can be achieved. In North Bay, Hannover, Midland, Penetanguishene, and Owen Sound "Communications Councils" are being set up to determine uses for community channels.

Vancouver, B.C.

The B.C. consumers association has been putting its own programming on cable and is now starting a new series with NFB support.

Hamilton, Ontario

NFB has helped to prepare programmes on local pollution and these were designed for use on the cable system.

Boucherville, Quebec

Students from the Informations Culturelles department of Université du Québec à Montréal are providing all original programming and production for the cable station owner, at his request.

Edmonton, Alberta

The Metropolitan Edmonton Educational Authority (M.E.E.T.A.) is a form of Charter Board producing mainly educational but some community programming and sharing a transmitter with the CBC French service (broadcast TV).

Normandin, Quebec

Citizens of Normandin run their channel—they make programmes for agricultural and industrial workers and the schools, and have stimulated considerable community spirit.

Yellowknife, N.W.T.

Only in talking stage but a similar situation to Edmonton is being planned. Equipment and trained people exist in Yellowknife and programmes have been produced that are compatible with CBC transmission facilities.

Fredericton, N.B.

City-Cable Vision Ltd. has had six hours of community programming per day for the past year. It has now bought Edmunston Cable (French language). It has portable units for coverage of sports and university discussions. A volunteer "Advisory Board" of eight people exists. A series on New Brunswick Indians attracted 40% of the available audience. Programmes contain phone-in audience reaction. Discussions concerning expanded community service are now taking place, and ½" equipment has been acquired for use by community groups.

Calgary, Alberta

C.R.T.C. acceded to the request of cable owner P. Davis to increase his subscription rate by 50c on condition that that money go to community programming.

Ontario Federation of Labour

O.F.L. is now organizing VTR workshops and by the end of 1971 expects to have over 1,000 persons trained in television techniques.

Toronto, Ontario

Citizens in Ward 7 (Cabbagetown) have started to programme on the community channel at the request of Rogers Cable. Rogers Cable is asking community groups to come forward to participate in cable casting.

Halifax/Dartmouth

During "Encounter Week" CJCH (CTV) and CBHT (CBC) gave extensive prime time coverage to this conference which received the highest audience rating for any programme seen in the Maritimes. Halifax and Dartmouth are to be wired by Spring 1971. NFB (Maritimes) will be organizing a seminar for the cable owners in the Halifax/Dartmouth area and a full representation of all citizens groups in the area has just been formed and will shortly be approaching Challenge for Change with a specific proposal to help them gain access to the community channels.

Pembroke, Ontario

The on-air station has successfully tried out direct transmission of ½" VTR and is willing to make time available to community groups.

Beloeil, Quebec

Live cablecasting of City Council meetings (first in Canada).

Winnipeg, Manitoba

The Institute of Urban Studies at the University of Winnipeg now has the funds to set up a communication project to explore a community TV system for "information and the betterment of urban democracy". Another project in Winnipeg involves the use of a closed-circuit system within a housing project of 1400 people.

Abitibi, Quebec

The local unions do community broadcasting over four counties, with the citizens making their own programmes.

what's not happening

COMMUNITY ACCESS

QUEBEC

The CRTC last year asked the cable companies to reserve one channel for community use. The response to this from cable companies has been virtually nil.

State of Quebec Cable

Quebec has a great number of small cable systems which are ill-equipped, function archaically and do not bring in very much money. 79 of the 162 cable enterprises were established between 1953-1960 before the advent of such major improvements as aluminum shielded cable. Also, many of the existing cable systems can hold a maximum of 6 channels—usually 4 Canadian, 1 American and in some cases FM radio. The costs of equipping a TV studio for even minor productions (about \$20,000) is a sum only the major cable companies can consider.

Many of the cable enterprises merely rechannel the accessible CBC and American stations. In five years 50% of the existing cable studios will be reequipped and begin to handle part of their own production. However, 80% of the cable companies are affiliated with or owned by telephone companies and their policies will be largely dependent on the politics/policies adopted by the telephone companies.

In Quebec, the confrontation between Ottawa and Quebec (see Bills 33,36, 37) over cable control within the province has further encouraged the cable companies to lay low.

The four main Quebec centres, Quebec City, Montreal, Sherbrooke and Trois-Rivières are doing very little community programming

e.g. Montreal

1) National Cablevision has 41 closed-circuit hours a week. 300-500 people weekly pass in front of their cameras. They tend toward "intimate" (from our living room to your living room) presentation. When National Cablevision talks about expansion it is thinking of hard talent, guest speakers, slicker production.

2) Cable TV says it is trying to schedule more community-oriented groups. One typical Saturday includes:

Montreal Media
Good Grooming
Nature Foods
Youth Theatre

Beside the main Quebec cable centers, only several other companies have made any attempt to produce some type of community programming. Most of these centers had the community programming they have now before the CRTC ruling.

The majority of Quebec cable enterprises are small, offering 2-3 channels to several hundred subscribers. Even if they could afford to produce programmes, which they cannot, these stations do not have an open channel. They could not even pay to maintain the upkeep on the equipment if they got it free. Neither would commercials raise enough money for community programming.

VANCOUVER

There is no obvious solution to the problem of how a central community group acting as a charter board or programming depot for a community can prevent itself from becoming a programming elite like any other. But right now it seems that a temporary blanket organization can make an impact in the direction of change that the existing programming entity and facility at cable Channel 10 cannot do alone.

Specifically on channel 10 there is:—a surfeit use of "off-the-shelf" film material produced by the public relations arms of large corporations and government institutions and the like, all of whom can underwrite the costs of their own material.—far too much reliance on studio production. Many of the critical or incredible aspects of human experience can't be transported to the studio.

—a reluctance to use ½ inch equipment because of the relative instability of the image. Portable ½ inch VTRs, however, are in large part responsible for the growing interest in community programming. Obviously ½ inch will improve to the point where it at least approaches broadcast standards. There is no justification for cable operators to be responsible to the Department of Communications TV signal requirements before it is formally established whether or not a cable-originated signal is broadcast or closed-circuit.

—routine formats (i.e. talkshows, announcer-type intros, etc.) and patronizing language are used to convince the community that the channel is really their own. The idea still persists that a benevolent corporation is extending a privilege to the people in the community who have something traditionally referred to as "a point of view", when for many people an idea or an intention develops out of some degree of exploration of complex parameters of reality.

Many very unique and exploratory interests and talents must be developed now on the existing free channel.

Among other things, "program packages" must be redistributed in such a way that TV can be an experience in itself rather than an experience of an introduction to an experience. The intention is to dissolve the boundaries around pro-program "types" in order to enter into the community in its constellated rather than layered form.

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