



Jim Hanley

Did you ever wonder just how serious our infatuation with the beaver is? Or, what really lies beneath all those maple leaves?

If so, the Ontario Educational Communications Authority may have some answers to these urgent national questions. The Authority is currently producing a Canadian Studies series called **True North** which aims to delve deep into our national psyche and come up with some hard national truths.

But wait a minute. How can the series be truly Canadian? It's witty, provocative, educational, moving, zany, flamboyant, fun, and one of the most original series ever to turn up on the tube.

If it's so original, how come it's Canadian? To tell the truth, no one seems to know. Apparently, someone at OECA which runs CICA-TV Channel 19, in the Toronto area, had an idea for a new series about Canada — something different from the usual public affairs programs that feature everything from Moose Jaw to maple syrup.

No, this series had to be different. And it is.

The **True North** series has a unique magazine format that makes the standard public affairs format look like yesterday's porridge. The producers have combined soap opera, historical dramatization, music, comedy, satirical skits, contemporary drama, historic film footage, broadcast journalism, and animation for a new television effect.

To avoid TV tedium, each program in the series is designed to be fast-paced with as many as 52 items per show. Some items are no longer than 10 seconds.

The programs in the series will be telecast bi-monthly on Channel 19 Toronto beginning in September of this year.

So far, so good. As long . . . well . . . as long as, you know . . . it isn't . . . too . . . controversial.

Not only is **True North** fun, its controversial and about CANADA!

"There's no doubt about it", says Jim Hanley, the co-ordinating producer of the series, "We will be dealing with some so-called 'touchy' subjects. We don't propose to always be negative but where criticism is felt to be needed we are going to provide it."

Jim Hanley and his fellow producers Bob Ennis and Don Thompson are hard at work in their office loft on Yonge Street on five new programs in the **True North** saga. Their average age is somewhere around thirty and between them they have more experience, counting over-time in film and television than Federico Fellini and the National Film Board combined.

The **True North** pilot "This Edition: Strong and Free?" has been completed and won the award as the best experimental documentary at the Hollywood World Television Festival in October 1972.

The pilot takes incidents from Canadian history and zeroes in on conditions in the present to document the viewpoint that a Canadian will become infatuated with anything, as long as it is not Canadian.

Canadians have a colonial mentality, have had it and continue to have it. We believe ourselves to be second-rate and act accordingly. Any standards of excellence we have are set outside the country, say the producers.

Most special documentaries are content with one or two hosts. **True North** swaggers onto the screen like a cigar-chewing Texas oil millionaire with four, count 'em, four hosts: Broadcast journalist Barbara Frum, country-rock singer Roy Payne, commentator Michael Magee, alias Fred C. Dobbs and petite French-Canadian folksinger Angèle Arsenault.

And that's not all. Each of the four hosts behaves in a decidedly un-Canadian manner: They get involved with the viewpoints expressed on the program; No microphone-in-hand-cardboard-commentary for these folks. They have views of their own, thank you and are darn well going to express them.

So when Michael Magee refers to Canada as "a big country with 22 million people and a lousy climate", that's Magee's viewpoint and not, necessarily, that of the producers involved.

The pilot was telecast in early November 1972 in the Toronto area. After the telecast, viewers were given the opportunity to air their views about the series on a phone-in radio show on CJRT-FM. Viewer response was enthusiastic. The OECA decided to proceed with production on the five new programs.

The format of the series is unique to Canadian television. In fact, no one has ever tried to do it before. Instead of a nice, safe special series dealing with Canadian topics as a dry-as-the-Prairie-dust documentary, the producers decided to limit each program to a single theme. Each theme is documented with facts from Canada's past and present-day conditions. From this pattern of the past and present the show moves into the future with some (sometimes) outrageous predictions by the series' hosts.

Don Thompson



Cherie Rogers

In addition to the four regular hosts, the **True North** series will feature the comical Canadian comments of "The Jest Society." The "Society" is a popular revue company specializing in satirical skits on robust life in the big northland.

But the most important fact perhaps, is not the unique format of the **True North** series but its unique subject matter. Canadian documentaries come and Canadian documentaries go. However, this is the first time a television station, or a network for that matter, has taken Canada in one big lump, grabbed the subject by the horns and devoted a whole series to the land and its people.



Actor George R. Robertson, director Ivo Nightingale and producer Bob Ennis during filming of "This Edition: We Stand On Guard For Thee".

True North

"This Edition: We Stand On Guard For Thee" is the first program to be broadcast when the series hits the airwaves in September.

Bob Ennis

The program will investigate the structure of power in Canada and how that power is distributed. Incidents from Canada's past, from Robert Goulay's squabbles with the Family Compact to R. B. Bennett's troubles with the Regina Riot in 1935, are highlighted.

The plight of the small western farmer pitted against the big food combines is the subject of the program's contemporary drama segment.

Hosts Roy Payne and Angèle Arsenault have written songs for the power program. Payne's composition, "One Step Forward, Two Steps Back" details the working man's struggle with too little money and too many loan sharks. Angèle sings a song about French-Canadians and the power structure as it appears to them — almost totally English and thus, highly visible.



"The Myth" is the second program to be broadcast in the series. The program delves into Canada's musty old attics to bring out some worn but cherished myths we clutch to our national bosom. For instance, the myth we particularly enjoy is the myth of Canada as a brave and strong northland and Canadians as brave and strong northlanders.

Mark True or False for this one.

"There is a historical idea," says Jim Hanley, "that Canadians are different and unique because we are northern people. The program will look at how the myth has manifested itself down through the ages and how the myth has coloured individual Canadian lives.

For an illustration of this last point True North interviewed the last of the "mountain men" Jimmy Simpson in Alberta, shortly before his recent death.

"Wherever we look in Canadian society there are contradictions to this myth," continues Hanley. "Our lives are more dependent on heat and comfort than the myth would allow."

Does this mean that underneath all our stuffy winter clothing, rubber boots and ski hats, we are a nation of pale, snivelling sissies?

Perhaps not as far as our foreign neighbours are concerned. Do they see us as a nation, strong and free, or as one big, vast, cuddly parkland?

Hanley and his crew spent four days in the Lakehead region filming three American businessmen from Houston Texas, as they hunted for moose in the bush. On the program, the Texans discuss, before and after, their visit whether their image of the country has changed.

Songwriter Bill Houston who wrote the popular "Objibway Country" for the *North of Superior* film will appear on "The Myth" program. He will sing "This Is Canada", one of his newest compositions.

The three remaining programs in the *True North* series are: "Immigration: The Promised Land"; "Distances", the concept of great distance in the development of the land and national character; and "The Quiet Diplomat", a program on Canadian diplomacy both in the past and as it is practised in the present.

Heavy ponderings on the "Canadian Identity Problem" are not welcome at the *True North* doorstep. If we have to explore who we are and where we have come from, it might as well be fun.

True North will be telecast in the Toronto area as well as on the OECA's provincial cable network ●

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