



Canadian Media Guild

La Guilde canadienne des médias

CWA Canada Local 30213 / Section locale 30213, SCA Canada

Oral Remarks | Présentation

CBC licence renewals | Renouvellement des licences de Radio-Canada

CRTC 2019-379

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[CARMEL SMYTH] -Good morning Mr. Chairman, Commissioners and CRTC staff.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear at this hearing.

We appreciate your hard work to ensure the public broadcaster is the best it can be.

I am joining you from Toronto, and we'd like to acknowledge that we are on the unceded territory of the Mississauga of the Credit River, the Huron-Wendat, the Anishnawbe and the Haudenosaunee.

My name is Carmel Smyth, president of the Canadian Media Guild, the union that represents the majority of CBC/Radio-Canada workers.

My colleagues Kim Trynacity (CBC Branch president) and Dominique Gauthier (Francophone Affairs director) are also long-time CBC journalists and part of the union's leadership team.

Jeanne d'Arc Umurungi is Canadian Media Guild's Communication director.

We are here today to share our support for and belief in the work of the national public broadcaster. We would like to go on the record noting the CBC/Radio-Canada will need stable long-term funding to fulfil its mandate, although we recognize the Commission does not determine levels of funding.

We hope you will agree that in these critical times, CBC/Radio-Canada is more necessary than ever - so it can be a leader in helping deal with the significant issues facing media and society as a whole: Some of the issues that we see include:

-the proliferation of all types of false information and deceptive news, harmful to the public

and democratic values;

-the increasing news poverty in communities as media organizations struggle, while global tech giants continue to grab the lion's share of advertising money

-this unfortunate reality has dramatically hurt employment opportunities for media workers, forcing talented, dedicated Canadians into precarious work and unemployment.

CBC/Radio-Canada has also been called upon by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Canadians across the country, and media workers to step up and lead improvements in the industry, that the national public broadcaster is uniquely placed to do: to ensure meaningful diversity and inclusion in its news coverage, programming, and hiring including in its leadership ranks.

As an example of where the Corporation can and must do better, a recent union survey showed many BIPOC [Black, Indigenous, People of Colour] employees had not received the opportunity for advancement even if they were more qualified than other candidates.

Change will require rigorous obligations for CBC/Radio-Canada. CBC members have asked for:

-transparency and accurate information from the Corporation so we can assess what progress is being made;

-better representation of equity-seeking groups from hiring and onboarding to retention and promotion at all levels of the corporation;

-promotion of employees from equity-seeking groups into more senior roles.

[KIM TRYNACITY] Thank you Carmel, and good morning Commissioners.

I'd like to speak to you about news, particularly local news.

Local news is especially important to me – having spent three decades as a television, radio and online journalist, most recently as a Legislative reporter in Alberta – before I became a fulltime national union leader just over a year ago.

Here are just two examples to illustrate the value of local news:

First: In late 2019 – CBC North suddenly announced it was going to merge all morning radio newscasts in the North.

Replacing familiar morning voices in Yukon, Nunavut, and the Northwest Territories with one newscast from Yellowknife.

There was an immediate outcry from the public from whom this made no sense – and staff was bewildered.

Legislators sternly denounced this.

Responding to mounting public pressure, CBC reversed the decision.

Second: At the outset of the Covid-19 pandemic in Canada – when all of us were struggling to grasp the scope and severity of the situation – suddenly, all local CBC television newscasts were pulled off the air.

Because so much of the technical operation is now centralized in Toronto – the system became overloaded, and CBC couldn't handle the volume of demand – so local casts were sacrificed.

Again – an immediate public outcry. Canadians from all walks of life were shocked.

Local coverage gradually returned, but it took about 8 months before supper, late and weekend television news was restored.

Survey after survey, Canadians say they trust and rely on CBC/Radio-Canada news in their communities. The 2019 Communications Monitoring Report showed “traditional television viewing still far exceeds viewing of Internet-based television.”

And yet there have been steady cuts to news over the years and more repetition.

How many times have you seen a great piece on the National, only to hear it word for word on the radio the next morning – afternoon – evening?

CBC workers still work very hard to provide high-quality journalism, but there are fewer reporters to dig up stories, cover municipal meetings, or just to leave their desks and go do newsgathering and reporting in the community.

Pre-pandemic – while I was still a reporter – I remember almost begging my assignment editor to let me go to a news conference in person. I was discouraged from going because that way I could file more quickly for all platforms.

Television news programs are poorly resourced. Some are half an hour, some an hour.

In most locations there are no reporters assigned at night and if there are – again the job is to dice and slice the story so it fits on radio, online – and if there's anything left – television.

Producers scour the network to fill shows, time and slots.

A word on long-form journalism – Very few documentaries are done these days

In 2014 the CBC Documentary Unit was shut down.

The Unit had brought such memorable and informative productions to Canadians as “The People’s History of Canada”, and “Syria: Behind Rebel Lines.”

At the time, CMG members pointed out that CBC television, to be true to its core mandate, needs more long-form journalism – not less. This remains true.

Members proposed that the Documentary Unit be embedded as part of the CBC News and Current Affairs department. This was rejected.

When CBC/Radio-Canada received some additional public funding for 2016-2019, 2/3rds of the money went to outside productions instead of reinvestments in news.

At the very minimum, the Commission should require the CBC to maintain current levels of local programming on television and radio.

We urge you to not give CBC/Radio-Canada a blank cheque when it comes to “flexibility”.

If you do, it may well mean the end of local television news shows. Will CBC local news be replaced by FaceBook Lives or Top Ten Lists?

Speaking of news quality, I will speak briefly about CBC Tandem, the new service the Corporation has launched to show paid content that is designed to look like real news. It is wrong.

In this era of growing misinformation, it’s a baffling choice for a public broadcaster. The public shouldn’t be put to a test when they click on CBC news.

In fact, so disturbed were many CMG members by this development, they signed a public letter and created a website to oppose Tandem. In doing so, they risked violating the CBC Journalistic Standards and Practices. The truth is, this branded content has no place at CBC at all.

To be clear, our union supports ads on CBC. Advertising revenue has helped keep CBC/Radio-Canada afloat over decades of underfunding and cuts.

However, we believe Tandem goes too far.

[DOMINIQUE GAUTHIER] Brièvement, pour les communautés linguistiques minoritaires francophones de l’Ouest, les nouvelles locales sont un service vital pour la survie et le maintien de la langue. Dans les régions telles que Calgary ou Winnipeg, Radio-Canada est le seul service local télévisuel en français disponible.

Pour ce qui est de la radio, je vous citerai le Rapport des communications de 2019 mentionné par Kim qui indique que : « Sans les stations et services de diffusion de CBC/Radio-Canada, les citoyens des régions de langue officielle en situation minoritaire au Canada perdraient 68 % de leur service de radio dans leur langue maternelle. »

Par ailleurs, on constate une certaine dilution de la programmation locale, en raison du recours aux émissions en reprise pour remplir la moyenne d'heures demandées par semaine.

Un autre exemple est l'utilisation d'une seule personne présentant la météo pour les quatre provinces de l'Ouest. Ceci nuit au rapport local de Radio-Canada avec la communauté. Sans compter le fait que, déjà dans certaines provinces comme la Saskatchewan, les émissions télé de nouvelles en fin de semaine sont remplacées par des bulletins de cinq minutes – ou moins quelques fois dans la soirée – dans les trous de programmation principale qui est presque entièrement québécoise.

C'est pour ces communautés de langue française en situation minoritaire à travers le pays que la Guilde appuie, au minimum, le maintien des obligations actuelles de Radio-Canada pour les nouvelles locales.

C'est pour ces communautés également que le syndicat soutien la distribution obligatoire des services de nouvelles de ICI RDI dans les marchés de langue majoritaire anglophone et de CBC News Network dans les marchés de langue majoritaire française. Nous appuyons également l'augmentation de tarif mensuel demandée pour assurer ce service.

[JEANNE D'ARC UMURUNGI] Here is a quick summary of CMG recommendations:

1. That, at a minimum, the Commission maintain current obligations for CBC/Radio-Canada radio and television services for local news and programming.

CMG opposes cutting television and radio news programming requirements.

While we wait for the online services to be brought into the regulated system, it is reasonable to expect the public broadcaster to uphold high standards and practices for its online news and other programming.

2. La Guilde appuie le maintien de la distribution obligatoire, dans les collectivités de tout le pays, des services de nouvelles ICI RDI et CBC News Network. La Guilde appuie également les augmentations demandées pour les tarifs mensuels de gros.

3. We recommend that, at a minimum, the Commission require CBC/Radio-Canada to report annually, publicly and in a clear accessible fashion, on its performance in the area of equity:

CMG members have asked for:

-transparency and accurate information from the Corporation so we can assess what progress is being made;

-better representation of equity-seeking groups from hiring and onboarding to retention and promotion at all levels of the Corporation;

-promotion of employees from equity-seeking groups into more senior roles

4. We believe CBC/Radio-Canada should drop branded content from its platforms

5. CMG recommends that the Commission bring to bear its institutional knowledge, data and information to emphasize the role and value of a strong national public broadcaster, and to support the need for adequate levels of funding for CBC/Radio-Canada.

6. We urge the Commission to support the BTLR proposal that -when the time comes- it play a leading role in overseeing a fund dedicated to the production of news, including local news on all platforms (BTLR recommendation 71).

CBC/Radio-Canada can make good use of such a fund to strengthen its local news programming.

7. We recommend that the CRTC study migration to online services to see the impact of this move, including the impact on employment opportunities in this sector so that when it's time to regulate these services, we have useful data and information.

In addition, we recommend that the Commission monitor CBC/Radio-Canada's online news services and gather the information that will allow it and the public to assess quality, and to address how digital fits into the overall news service offering by the national public broadcaster.

