

PBC21: Public Broadcasting for Canada in the 21st Century
DPC21: Diffusion publique au Canada pour le 21^è siècle
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ORAL COMMENTS TO

CRTC PUBLIC CONSULTATION 2019-379

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Speakers:

Kealy Wilkinson

Alain Pineau

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Paul Gaffney

Alain Saulnier

KEALY:

Mr. Chairman, Commissioners, I'm Kealy Wilkinson and with me are a few of our PBC21 number, Alain Pineau, Jeffrey Dvorkin, Paul Gaffney and Alain Saulnier. I should acknowledge that we are also members of the "Formers", the many one-time CBC/RC staffers who have asked for your regulatory consideration of Tandem's impact on the CBC's credibility. Thank you for the invitation to appear.

For decades, the Corporation's management has struggled to administer one of the world's largest public broadcasting services. Limited resources have always been a challenge but the intention was never that CBC/R-C's services would simply provide more of the same programming already available from other Canadian stations and networks.

Today, digital technologies have erased national borders. Advertising revenue is fleeing traditional media (including CBC) and a succession of governments has slashed CBC's annual appropriations. Drastic action had to be taken as revenue disappeared. CBC management took it ... but to the detriment of the Corporation's public service mandate.

Management commandeered resources from local and regional services and redirected them to shore up network television and grow new digital platforms. In a frantic search for dollars, it maximized the number of commercial windows on its TV networks, even in newscasts and then along came Tandem.

Now one of its key services, CBC-TV, has become a public broadcaster in name only.

It is now a self-described 'publicly subsidized commercial network' – but in English Canada the Corporation's most popular and distinctive services are its non-commercial radio networks. The CBC proposals in review at this hearing provide little reassurance that Corporate management recognizes its unique role and that is why today we can offer only conditional support for the renewal of CBC/Radio-Canada's licenses.

Alain?

ALAIN PINEAU :

Bonjour. La mission de notre diffuseur public, c'est d'être **au service du public canadien**.

Vous voyez beaucoup de cheveux blancs sur ce panel, mais la notion de *service public* que nous défendons, **elle**, n'a pas vieilli.

Vous l'avez entendu souvent cette semaine : le **mandat** de Radio-Canada/CBC reste le même : intéresser, informer, éclairer, divertir et inspirer les Canadiens, **et** créer des ponts entre les diverses communautés de ce vaste pays.

La Loi sur la radiodiffusion de 1991 stipule que les services de diffusion en français et en anglais, exercent leur mandat sous différentes conditions et qu'ils peuvent avoir des façons différentes de s'acquitter de ce mandat.

Radio-Canada a joué un rôle indéniable dans la protection de la langue et de la culture française au pays, et particulièrement au Québec. Elle a contribué largement au développement des talents francophones et à celui d'un « star system » que le reste du Canada envie.

Mais ni Radio-Canada ni la CBC n'ont consacré les ressources nécessaires pour échanger ou co-produire régulièrement des émissions entre les deux groupes de langues officielles, non plus d'ailleurs que d'exploiter pleinement le talent qui se trouve dans les diverses régions. En retirant progressivement les ressources des régions, la Société n'a même pas su établir des ponts entre les différentes parties d'un même groupe linguistique!

Les réductions successives des budgets et les impératifs de la commercialisation du service ont mené en effet à une centralisation de plus en plus grande de la production ***au détriment du véritable service public***.

Qu'un représentant des ventes commerciales ait son mot à dire sur les choix de programmation du diffuseur public, que la créativité, l'originalité et le risque attendus du diffuseur public soient soumis à des considérations de combien de revenu l'émission peut rapporter, sinon on laisse tomber, est une distorsion inacceptable du service public comme nous l'entendons.

C'est pourquoi nous disons que Radio-Canada/CBC doit être restructuré comme un système de médias de service public débarrassé des contraintes commerciales.

Jeffrey?

JEFFREY:

Hello. I'm Jeffrey Dvorkin.

What would it mean to re-structure CBC Radio-Canada?

Re-structuring CBC means decentralizing how the Corporation works.

We think that is the way to make CBC-Radio Canada more useful, more vital and more truly Canadian.

Re-structuring means recognizing that the range of Canada-wide talent, stories and concerns has been reduced by the CBC's relentless centralizing of resources.

The essence of the CBC and Radio Canada is to be found elsewhere and not just in Toronto, in Montreal and from time to time, in Vancouver.

The core of the public broadcaster is to be found in the dozens of stations around the country. Those audiences now rarely see or hear themselves or their concerns in what is acquired and distributed by the network of the national public broadcaster.

We believe that local programmers and managers should be able to have a far greater role in deciding what to run, and when. Local producers and managers are best positioned to know their audiences.

And CBC News is now the largest single news-gathering agency in Canada. It should also be re-thought to serve as a complement to the public's need for reliable information. We propose to make all news stories, now on the CBC digital, indigenous, and traditional services, available to any private media organization, in return for proper credit of course, but at no cost.

We all pay for the news service: every Canadian should benefit from it.

We all pay for the public broadcaster: every region should be able to participate.

Restructuring means reimagining CBC's Canada in a 21st century context ... geographically, economically, culturally and technologically.

Restructuring means turning today's CBC on its head.

Paul...

PAUL:

Hello. I'm Paul Gaffney. No matter what vision we may have for public broadcasting, we inevitably come to the question of resources – how are we going to pay for it?

Since CBC Radio-Canada was founded, there has never been enough public funding to pay for everything we've asked it to do.

From the beginning, advertising revenue has been needed to supplement taxpayer dollars. Over the years, CBC's dependence on ads has continued to grow, to influence both programming and scheduling choices and, increasingly, as the digital presence expands, to dominate CBC's image.

At the same time, as you've heard more than once, comparing the CBC's per capita public funding to that in other industrialized nations puts us third from the bottom -- barely *a third of the average* of those other public broadcasters, most of whom don't face anything like the CBC's challenges in terms of geography, language, culture and, critically, competition.

Today, we're suffering the confluence of all of those pressures.

The relentless quest for commercial revenue on the television and digital services is clearly doing the CBC more harm than good. The ongoing protest over Tandem's branded content is a prime example of that problem – and it's backed up by the volume of critical comments we find in the interventions.

We simply must end that dependency.

Then we'll have to fund the future the CBC apparently aspires to ... or else redesign the service to match what we're able to pay for it.

There are, after all, other ways of looking at public broadcasting – and other ways of funding it.

Whatever we decide, the status quo is no longer an option.

KEALY:

This hearing is a watershed event in our history. It's possible that there will never again be such an opportunity to re-frame and revitalize our national public service broadcaster.

In 1936, CBC/Radio-Canada was created as a public trust. Nearly a century later, it holds massive creative and other resources on behalf of the people of Canada. It is these resources and its services that the Commission must safeguard for our shared future. And that's an enormous responsibility.

But the Corporation's management has put a tollgate on the national public broadcasting dream of its founders.

- Great national artistic and documentary assets that belong to all of us are languishing in the Corporation's archives and demand to be liberated.
- The vision of our people working together to share their arts and discourse has been entombed in two solitudes. They demand to be released.
- And the mandate to inform, enlighten and entertain citizens regardless of language, ethnicity, religion or class has been replaced by a preference to deliver marketable Canadians to advertisers.

Your current regulatory dilemma may seem like fencing with feathers, but may we respectfully remind you that the Corporation was founded not to wholesale domestic consumers to corporate clients but to deliver audio-visual programs of interest to all Canadians.

This Commission has the moral and legal authority to ensure that the foundations on which the CBC was built are affirmed and renewed.

The power rests with you to preserve and protect our cultural heritage assets, to nourish and enable discourse and dialogue throughout our nation and affirm the most fundamental principle of all:

- that our airwaves and bandwidths -- analog and digital -- belong to the Canadian people.

Thank you for your time and attention. We're happy to take your questions.