



SYNDICAT DES COMMUNICATIONS DE RADIO-CANADA

**Radio-Canada/CBC: in need of a mission, funding and governance that serves Canadians**

**Brief presented to the Senate Committee on Transport and Communications**

**The challenges faced by Radio-Canada/CBC in relation to the changing environment of  
broadcasting and communications**

**by the Syndicat des communications de Radio-Canada**

**November 5, 2014**

Isabelle Montpetit, President  
Syndicat des communications de Radio-Canada  
1411, rue Amherst, Suite 301  
Montréal, H2L 3L2  
scrc@scrc.qc.ca

This brief is presented by the Syndicat des communications de Radio-Canada, which represents about 1,600 Radio-Canada/CBC employees in Quebec and Moncton. Our members are journalists, production assistants, production equipment assistants, captioners, hosts, columnists, etc. In short, all those who work in broadcasting, as well as those who design, prepare, coordinate and finalize programs and online content. Our union is affiliated with the Confédération des syndicats nationaux [Confederation of National Trade Unions].

The world of communications is undergoing profound change. We hear this phrase so often that it has even become a cliché. The written press is in crisis: the business model of newspapers and magazines is undermined by the proliferation of free content on digital platforms (web, tablets, phones, etc.). The proliferation of television channels has fragmented audiences, and a growing number of people are changing their viewing habits by turning to new platforms.

It is these very changes that are behind the hearings of the Senate Committee on Transport and Communications.

### **A fundamental mission**

Radio-Canada / CBC must change with the times, as it has always done, and as everyone in the world of media and communications does. But Radio-Canada must first play its role set out in the Broadcasting Act: to provide comprehensive programming that is predominantly and distinctively Canadian and that informs, enlightens and entertains. This programming must also serve the needs of Canada's regions and actively contribute to cultural expression.

Radio-Canada has fulfilled this role in many ways since its creation. The creation of the Alcan Quartet is just one example affecting the regional component and culture. The string quartet, based in the Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean region, was founded almost 25 years ago and performs across Canada and abroad. Radio-Canada played a crucial role in the quartet's development by offering, in its infancy, to broadcast two concerts a year on its network.

Radio-Canada's mission to inform is essential for Canadians to play their role as citizens, both at home and abroad. Radio-Canada has offices across Canada and in many parts of the world, from where it informs Canadians in English, French and eight Aboriginal languages. Its international service (Radio Canada International), long broadcast worldwide on shortwave, now offers a Canadian perspective on news to newcomers and citizens of the world in five languages (Chinese, Arabic, Spanish, French and English) on the Internet.

This mission to inform is crucial to Canadian democracy and a sense of belonging among Canadians, especially for the approximately 200,000 immigrants who arrive each year in our country. To be responsible citizens, Canadians need to be well-informed. However, information is not necessarily a profitable investment, and successive cuts to Radio-Canada's budget have had an impact on the quality of information services provided to Canadians.

In addition to informing, Radio-Canada's programming must enlighten Canadians. Many people say that Radio-Canada is like a university for the masses. Its many public affairs programs allow

Canadians to better understand the issues that affect them. Who else but a public broadcaster can spend time and money on issues relating to science, agriculture, food, the economy, politics, religion and so on? Not to mention investigations, which make it possible to inform the public about ethics violations and common rules that are broken.

Lastly, Radio-Canada must entertain—through programming it produces or contracts out to private producers. As a producer of programming, Radio-Canada can play a leadership role across the audiovisual production industry. Its public service role is to experiment with bold content and new forms, without necessarily being pressured to make a profit. Its infrastructure—studios, sets, costumes, etc.—belong to Canadians who paid for them, and they are regularly used by private producers. Some Radio-Canada staffers (artisans, technicians, producers, assistants, etc.) are also part of private production teams who use Radio-Canada's infrastructure, thus helping maintain a skilled and stable workforce.

Radio-Canada programming must continue to play its role to inform, enlighten and entertain, regardless of the platform on which it is broadcasts.

### **The dismantling of a public service**

Yet this core mission is at risk because of CBC/Radio-Canada's financial difficulties. Since the early 90s, Radio-Canada's funding has been steadily declining. \$155 million in federal cuts were made from 2012 to April 2014.

Here are the changes made to the French network since 2009 due to Radio-Canada's financial difficulties:

- In Sports, 55 of 75 jobs were cut. Radio-Canada has distinguished itself by its coverage of amateur sport, which private networks neglect. Now, amateur events will be covered only if they pay for coverage themselves. The sports bulletin on *Téléjournal* has been cancelled.
- Regional radio programming on Saturdays on the *Première Chaîne* is over.
- Audience Relations services have been cut on the French network, but not the English network. Each year it received about 140,000 calls (complaints, comments and questions) from French listeners, viewers and Internet users. Of this number, about 40,000 received a more extensive response.
- One producer and three journalist positions were cut from *Enquête*, and one journalist position from *La semaine verte*.
- 47 information-related positions were cut.
- More re-runs on radio and TV.
- The *Téléjournal* was cut to 30 minutes from 1 hour.
- The call centre was closed, which monitored police and emergency service communications about possibly newsworthy events.
- On-the-hour radio newscasts were cut from 8 minutes to 6 minutes.
- The 8:00 a.m. newscast was cut by 5 minutes.
- The 6:30 a.m., 7:30 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. newscasts were cancelled.
- The 5:00 p.m. newscast was cut by 5 minutes, and the 6:00 newscast was cut.
- The 9:00 p.m. newscast on RDI was cut.

- Journalists at the Sherbrooke station were told to stop doing radio reports.
- End of the noon TV news bulletins in the regions.
- End of regional programming on Espace musique.
- End of overnight programming on Espace musique.
- Advertising now on Espace musique.
- Fewer episodes for some shows.
- Une heure sur Terre cut, which was hosted by Jean-François Lépine and covered international issues.
- Radio/Canada offices closed in Senegal, Africa, and Brazil, South America. Journalist Sophie Langlois now covers Africa from Montreal.
- Shutdown of Bande à part and its website, which discovered emerging music.
- TV news bulletins now produced using automated controls, greatly reducing the flexibility of a live broadcast.
- End of Radio Canada International (RCI) shortwave transmission. RCI was in some ways the Canadian equivalent of Radio France International: a service that broadcast uncensored information in Mandarin, Russian, Spanish, Portuguese, Arabic, French and English all around the world. The Brazilian and Russian sections are closed. RCI is now broadcast on the Internet only. However, in China, the RCI site is censored...
- End of shortwave transmission in the Canadian North.
- 607 analog transmitters, who allowed thousands of Canadians to capture TV signals using antennas, were let go.
- Receptionist positions in regional stations were cut. Producers must now answer the door or the phone themselves.
- 8 stenographer positions cut and the closed-captioning unit for the hearing-impaired restructured.
- Teams cut for Une heure sur terre, Découverte, La facture, Enquête and L'épicerie.
- One of two correspondents in Paris brought back.
- End of RDI Junior.
- Youth programming time slots cut by half.
- End of regionally produced noon programming on the radio. Montreal's became national.
- Integration of radio/TV/web information. Teams must increasingly provide content for several platforms, which means less time to spend on research for reporting. Research journalist positions cut.
- To save on accommodation costs, employees work in open offices. At the Matane station, for example, there is no studio or control room. Hosts welcome their guests in the middle of the newsroom. If there is noise, you hear it on the air. If someone wants to record an interview for future broadcast, they have to wait until the show is over because of the noise.

In June 2014, two months after he announced 657 job cuts at CBC/Radio-Canada, CEO Hubert T. Lacroix announced a strategy for 2015-2020 that would result in cuts of \$100 million and the elimination of some 1,500 positions. These new cuts are therefore not required by the federal government. On October 30, 2014, senior management announced the first 400 positions to be cut under this strategy.

The objective of this strategy, as presented by senior management, is to set aside money to move toward digital. Senior management cannot be blamed for wanting to change with the times. But

these changes affect the very mission of Radio-Canada/CBC's public service. Management made these changes without public debate, without consulting Canadians. It is making these changes without announcing its true intentions, moving forward bit by bit and keeping employees in the dark.

Here are some examples of the impact of the cuts announced on October 30, 2014. At the Moncton station, a dozen positions will be eliminated. Services to Acadian communities will be affected.

In Montreal, media technicians, who build Radio-Canada's memory, saw their positions cut. They archive all content that is broadcast so it is available to the public. Moreover, this service generated revenue for Radio-Canada.

The costume department is to be cut. Behind the symbolic costumes of Bobino and Paillason, this service benefited Radio-Canada productions as well as private TV, film and web producers, which also generated revenues.

In the same vein, the transformation of Maison Radio-Canada in Montreal was also done without public debate. Management launched a tender to sell the tower and build a smaller building with Radio-Canada as a tenant. However, the building was initially to contain four audiovisual production studios. In the latest version of the project, there will be just one studio. These are production capacities that belong to all Canadians and that will disappear for good.

### **Opaque governance**

Radio-Canada/CBC is a public service that was created for Canadians. However, its mode of governance does not reflect its public service mission. The CEO and the board of directors are appointed by the government in power and have very little accountability to the public. For example, the minutes of the board are largely blacked out. The current board is mostly made up of contributors to the ruling party who have little knowledge of the media environment. There is political intervention in programming, yet public broadcasting should be totally independent of any political influence.

Elsewhere in the world, public broadcasting services have a mode of governance that reflects citizens' interests. For example, in the UK, the BBC Trust governs the BBC, ensuring citizens' interests, separate from the board. Canada would do well to examine the governance of its public broadcasting service to make it more transparent.

### **Our recommendations**

The Syndicat des communications de Radio-Canada, with the support of the Confédération des syndicats nationaux, launched the campaign Tous amis de Radio-Canada. Its *White Paper on the Future of Radio-Canada* raises Radio-Canada's funding, governance and programming issues. We are asking for a moratorium on cuts to the CBC. We are also asking for multi-year, stable funding increased to about \$40 per Canadian from the current \$29 per Canadian, one of the

lowest in the world. Lastly, we ask that the future of Radio-Canada, its funding, its governance and its programming be given broad public debate before any irreversible decisions are made.