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The “Reinvestment” in CBC/Radio-Canada: a reality-check

Letter to the CBC Board of Directors from the Canadian Media Guild

With the federal government about to reveal its 2018 budget, it’s time to do a reality check on the \$675 million ‘reinvestment’ in CBC/Radio-Canada over five years, especially since the government cites it as evidence of support for the country’s news organizations.

Let’s be clear: the CBC has directed very little of that \$675 million to news – a fact it does not deny.

When the Liberals came to power in 2015, the Canadian Media Guild was pleased to see the new government allocate this additional funding, after the years of cuts. Like the many voters who made the re-funding of CBC/Radio-Canada an issue during that year’s campaign, employees were led to believe some of the ‘reinvestment’ would be directed to areas where they work.

But the CBC’s own breakdown shows two-thirds of the new money (\$92 million out of \$150 million per year) went to outside productions for prime-time television shows in each fiscal year from 2017-18 to 2020-21. **This isn’t a reinvestment in CBC, it’s an investment in the companies who produce programming for the CBC.**

The CBC/Radio-Canada’s Accountability Plan states, “our goal is to make the public broadcaster more digital, more local and more ambitious in its Canadian programming, and in doing so increase our value to Canadians.” It also says it will reinvest in select regions where previous cuts went too deep.

But despite the Plan, the funding has not been restored to the areas that were cut too deep. The much-hailed new station in London, Ontario was partly a result of taking resources from Windsor. Approximately 500 jobs have been lost since 2009, much of that in newsgathering capacity, including news shooters, producers and reporters in the field. Radio programming has been especially hard hit.

Our members are increasingly concerned about the lack of resources, especially at a time when more platforms require content. They worry about the impact on quality and reliability – the main ‘brand’ of the public broadcaster. They worry about their own ability to create programs or news items for several platforms, often at the same time. Here are some of their own words from a recent consultation :

“It’s a myth that one writer or producer can feed all platforms - the deadlines are all at the same time”

“There is less original journalism on the ground”

“Radio and TV production units are devastated on a daily basis. They are starting to give up. Morale is low.”

CBC has a critical role to play in terms of news and current affairs at a time when solid journalism is under attack and when local news faces an especially serious threat. The CBC is the single largest newsgathering organization in the country. As a public broadcaster, it has a key role in supporting Canada’s democracy. Quality news in an era of ‘fake news’ is especially important. The CBC should be directing much more money to news on all its platforms, now more than ever.

As members of the Board of Directors, you have a unique opportunity to steer the Corporation’s budget and strategy. We ask you to urge the Corporation’s Senior Management to think beyond doing more with less – it’s time to do more with more.

We are ready to meet with you to discuss these pressing issues at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,

Jonathan Spence
President of the Canadian Media Guild at CBC/Radio-Canada

