



September 2, 2022

CBC/Radio-Canada Board of Directors

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**Subject: Use of the "n word" at CBC/Radio-Canada**

We are writing on behalf of Black Canadian Media Guild (CMG) members working at CBC/Radio-Canada concerning the use of the "n word" and how the Corporation handled a complaint about use of the term on a SRC radio program.

The union has heard from many members who are disappointed by CBC/Radio-Canada's decision to appeal the CRTC ruling, fearing defending it legitimizes a demeaning, traumatizing and racist term.

CBC/Radio-Canada's public support for any use of the "n word" continues to be triggering for many Black employees. As well, the union has heard from Indigenous and other workers of colour who also find the use of the "n word" indefensible and offensive.

**Our concerns relate to the following:**

- Even after a Black listener filed a complaint about hearing the “n word” 4 times in a 6-minute segment (3 times in French and again in English) on the afternoon show *Le 15-18* of August 17, 2020, the public broadcaster failed to address his concerns, even though serving the interests of all Canadians equally is a core part of CBC/Radio-Canada’s role.

The CBC’s Ombudsperson also failed to respond with the care and consideration any member of the public, regardless of race, would expect.

Only when the affronted listener elevated his complaint to the CRTC did CBC/Radio-Canada deliver any meaningful response - and that, only after the Commission ordered the Corporation ([Broadcasting Decision CRTC 2022-175](#)) to deal with the complaint in a more forthright way.

The union and many members are disappointed that CBC/Radio-Canada did not issue an unequivocal response recognizing the “n word” is racist in its history, intent and impact.

- Additionally, the fact the public broadcaster appears not to have taken the racism complaint seriously initially speaks volumes. Particularly when media organizations generally accept that any single complaint reflects the opinion of many listeners/viewers. As we know, while a few will take the time to formally register a concern, many more are likely just as shocked and hurt, some perhaps too much so to talk about the emotional toll of being subjected repeatedly to a derogatory, racist term on the public broadcaster.
- Moreover, in the union’s view, it is disconcerting that the Corporation has claimed it is now addressing the issues raised because it is the right thing to do, and not because the CRTC ordered a more specific response. This is not credible since the specific response comes two years after the complaint was registered with CBC/Radio-Canada. This adds to the concern that the response is not as serious as the situation warrants.

As a public broadcaster, CBC/Radio-Canada should aim to deal with all complaints, including those by listeners/viewers from marginalized or racialized groups, in an appropriate fashion.

The refusal to deal with the initial complaint seriously has surely led to a decrease in respect for, and engagement with CBC/Radio-Canada from many Canadians.

Many Black Canadians have noted that this complaint was treated dismissively just three months after the racist murder of U.S. citizen George Floyd, and two months after [the Corporation had issued](#), as a result, [a statement claiming](#) that:

*“(…) Over the past few weeks, many of our employees have been reporting on the issue for our news services or raising it in our programming; others have been sharing their own experiences of how racism has affected them, both personally and professionally. We are sensitive to and deeply troubled by their stories. (...)” We recognize that systemic racism exists in Canada and within many of its institutions, including its national public broadcaster. We are committed to combating*

*racism in all its forms, to removing structural barriers and practices that result in discrimination at CBC/Radio-Canada, and to improving our workplace culture in tangible, concrete ways.”*

The gap between words and action is disheartening.

This situation clearly shows why it is critical for the Corporation to increase efforts to overcome the entrenched attitudes and systemic racism that may be in the way of serving Black and racialized audiences on the same level as White audiences.

- In the aftermath of the CRTC Decision, a group of employees past and present, united to demand that CBC/Radio-Canada challenge the CRTC order.

Notably, this group did not speak to address diverse or marginalized media workers' concerns. We have heard and would like to share the union's belief that the silence of the Black employees or workers of colour should not be interpreted as acquiescence. Instead, remaining silent in the face of what many see as anti-Black racism may more likely suggest fear, anger, exhaustion, and discouragement.

A word on journalistic independence: The independence of journalists and media workers to do their work to inform the public and hold the powerful to account is paramount and a corner stone of democracy. This is precisely why it should never be used to justify lack of care or consideration toward some parts of the public. Diversity in newsrooms helps to give more meaning to that independence and to strengthen the quality of journalism and the information provided to the public.

The CMG urges the CBC/Radio-Canada to make every effort and muster the courage to take action in the interests of all Canadians.

**To do this, we urge the Corporation to:**

1. Conduct a full investigation on the use of “n word” at CBC/Radio-Canada and make the results public. This would include speaking to a broad range of people, including Black employees and Black members of the audience.
2. Review the Corporation's journalistic standards and practices in both French and in English, to ensure none are outdated or could be used to cover entrenched systematic racism.
3. Create a permanent advisory committee to work with the network to better handle such sensitive and important issues when they arise. This would also restore public faith in the good will and intent of the organization.
4. Apologize to Black employees of CBC/Radio-Canada for what they have had to suffer through this and so many other unjust and unfair practices in the past decades as the media have failed to address anti-Black racism. Make tangible commitments by which these employees will hold the Corporation accountable.

**CMG-CBC Branch Executive Committee:**

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**Carmel Smyth, President, Canadian Media Guild**