

BILL C-60 THREATENS CBC'S INDEPENDENCE

OPEN LETTER TO THE PRIME MINISTER

We express deep concern about a proposal on pages 108/109 in Bill C-60 that would undermine the arms-length relationship between the CBC, our national public broadcaster, and the federal government.

The Broadcasting Act states that the CBC "shall, in the pursuit of its objects and in the exercise of its powers, enjoy freedom of expression and journalistic, creative and programming independence".

As you know, this statement places the CBC on a par with its counterparts in other free and democratic countries. It is what makes the CBC a public broadcaster – as opposed to a state broadcaster. Independence from governmental interference is the key distinction between the two – throughout the world.

Bill C-60 proposes to amend the Financial Administration Act to permit the government to set the mandate for and audit CBC's collective bargaining, as well as give the government a veto over CBC's collective agreements. This means that the government would become the effective employer of CBC's personnel, including its journalists, producers and story editors.

Such powers would intrude into the CBC's independence well beyond its employees' compensation. Conditions of work are an integral part of CBC's collective agreements with its various employee groups. Such conditions currently provide assurance of the integrity of CBC as an independent national public broadcaster, as required under the Broadcasting Act.

For example, conditions of work in CBC's collective agreements ensure that:

- Journalists cannot be pulled off assignments without good reason.

- CBC is required to protect the authority of producers over the content, form and budget of a program.

- Journalists do not have to fear retribution, including loss of employment, as a result of reporting the news.

- Producers cannot be removed from a program without justification, and they have the right to refuse to produce a program if they do not agree with its content or form.

Were Bill C-60 to pass without amendment, any government could change such provisions in its own interest – at great cost to Canadian democracy.

The federal government already has more than ample influence over CBC through appointment of its CEO and Board of Directors, and the allocation of its federal grant.

We therefore urge in the strongest terms that Bill C-60 be amended to remove all references to the CBC.

Yours sincerely,

PAUL ADAMS
Associate Professor,
Carleton School of Journalism
and Communication
Former parliamentary reporter,
CBC-TV; former Parliamentary
Bureau Chief, CBC Radio

COLETTE BRIN
Professeur titulaire, Département
d'information et de communication
Université Laval

TONY BURMAN
Former head CBC News and
Al Jazeera English

BERNARD DEROME
Journaliste

MAURICE GODIN
Ex-journaliste SRC, membre-à-vie
Tribune de la presse parlementaire
Ottawa

NOREEN GOLFMAN
Dean of Graduate Studies
Memorial University

SARAH SCHMIDT
Former Postmedia News reporter

PATRICK BROWN

DONNA LOGAN
Founding Director and Professor
Emerita, UBC Graduate School of
Journalism

DON NEWMAN CM
Senior Parliamentary Editor
CBC Television News (1988 – 2009)

ALAIN SAULNIER
Ancien DG des services
d'information SRC (2006 – 2012)
Professeur invité, Université de
Montréal, DESS en journalisme

FLORIAN SAUVAGEAU
Directeur, Centre d'études sur les
medias, Université Laval

JOE SCHLESINGER
CBC foreign correspondent
emeritus

IVOR SHAPIRO
Chair and Associate Professor,
School of Journalism
Ryerson University

STEPHEN J. A. WARD
Director,
Turnbull Centre for Journalism
School of Journalism and
Communication
University of Oregon – Portland

HUGH WINSOR
Life member, Parliamentary Press
Gallery, columnist emeritus,
Globe and Mail



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