



CRTC Decision Spells Potential Disaster

Toronto – May 16, 2017. Yesterday, the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) dealt a major blow to Canadian screenwriters — and Canadian audiences. In its decision on licence renewals for Bell, Corus, and Rogers, the Commission rolled back the broadcasters' minimum financial contributions to Canadian drama and other programming.

This despite the fact that the WGC's modest proposal to the CRTC, reflecting well-researched data, asked only for the maintenance of the status quo in terms of broadcasters' financial contributions towards "programs of national interest" (PNI). PNI includes drama, documentary, and some children's programming, programming that is at the heart of Canadian on-screen entertainment. But the CRTC set PNI spending minimums for broadcasters at 5%, basically cutting them by up to 44% for certain groups.

"This could mean the devastation of Canadian domestic production," says Maureen Parker, Executive Director of the WGC. "These cuts potentially amount to over a \$200 million loss for PNI over a five-year licence term. Canadian screenwriters only work on domestic productions, not on American shows filming in Canada, and if there is not enough work for them they will simply leave. Once our talent pool is gone you can't get it back."

CRTC chair Jean-Pierre Blais, a Harper appointee who has allowed the CRTC to become greatly diminished, has also set us on a course that will make it more and more difficult for Canadians to view stories about ourselves. This, despite the fact that it is only our Canadianness that distinguishes us: Our compassion, our humour, our concern about issues such as cultural diversity, healthcare, and the environment. A Canadian culture that cannot speak to Canadianness through its own storytelling is not Canada. We should not accept it. Nor should the Liberal government.

The headline of the CRTC's own press release announcing the decision is, "The CRTC supports the production of original content." This can only be viewed as fake news. There is nothing meaningful about specifically original production in these decisions. The release goes on to claim that the CRTC "ensures on stable funding for Canadian production in all program categories, by focusing especially on dramas, documentaries, and musical and variety shows." This is patently untrue, given the reduction of PNI requirements. And, since broadcaster spending on PNI also typically attracts investment from other sources like the Canada Media Fund, the potential total impact could be double or triple the \$200 million drop in PNI investments themselves.

"If Canadian programming is expendable," says Maureen Parker, "Why protect the big private broadcasters? What is the CRTC's purpose if not to ensure that spending on the creation of Canadian drama, documentary, and children's programming is at the very least maintained? It's almost as though the very body intended to promote Canadian programming — the CRTC — is actively working to erode it."

Contact: Li Robbins, Director of Communications, Writers Guild of Canada
416-979-7907 extension 5234 l.robbsins@wgc.ca

The Writers Guild of Canada (WGC) represents 2,200 professional English-language screenwriters across Canada, the creators of the distinctly Canadian entertainment enjoyed on all screens.