

# ICI RADIO CANADA

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To listeners for the CBC French language services the title will be a familiar slogan. Translated into English the slogan means Here Is Radio Canada. However, after the week of February 27 many loyal CBC listeners may be asking themselves where Here is going to be. That was the week that saw a new Federal budget come down hard on all area of the government and CBC was no exception. A resignation of the CBC's President will also help shape the future of the corporation for many years to come. Add to this two Federal government commissions reviewing all aspects of the CBC and you soon realize the scope of changes that are on the way at the CBC. In fact the title of this article may well reflect what is occurring at the CBC, a shrinking in size.

The CBC's president Tony Manera has resigned for what was called "personal reasons". After a couple of days these reasons became much clearer. It seems that Mr. Manera's reasons were that he did not wish to be the head of a ship that was sinking fast. The federal budget that was brought down that week saw the CBC facing a 4% cut to its budget. This would amount to about \$44,000,000.00 from its \$1,100,000,000.00 budget. Yes you read those numbers correctly, the CBC receives over one Billion dollars a year in tax payer money to maintain its various operations. This is on top of the money it makes from commercial revenue on the three television networks. Many Canadians are now looking at the CBC as a drain on the Federal budget. This coupled with astronomic feeling by all Canadians that we are being too heavily taxed make the CBC a likely target of further budget restraints.

Tony Manera claimed that he "would not have the stomach" to implement not only these cuts in revenue to the corporation, but the additional cuts that are scheduled to take place over the next three years. In reality the cuts that the CBC will be facing will amount not to the \$44-million dollars but a cut of \$360-million dollars. These far larger cuts are based on previously announced cuts that are to be implemented by 1997/98. These larger cuts are based on a \$180-million dollar short fall forecasted for each of the next three budget years.

At present the CBC has a staff of about 9,100 working in all of its various networks. If funding is to be cut over the next three years by as much as 25 per cent many of these jobs will disappear. The present \$180-million dollar funding shortfall for this year, that was forecast before the present budget was brought down, would have meant a reduction of up to 1,000 staff positions. These cuts were expected to be incremental rather than a massive restructuring being under taken at this time. This however may have to change. Many staff remember all too well the cuts a few years ago, that saw several television stations such as the one in Windsor ON shut down on very short notice.

Facing such large cuts as well as losing its president in one week was not the end of the jolts to befall the CBC this week. In order to insure that these cuts are implemented by a yet to be named new president, the government set up two commissions to look into the CBC. For those of you not familiar with the CBC in its entirety there are several sections to the corporation:

- ☐ The English Language Radio Network
- ☐ The Stereo Radio Network (also in English on FM)
- ☐ The French Language Radio Network (Radio Canada)
- ☐ The English Language Television Network
- ☐ The French Language Television Network
- ☐ Radio Canada International (the Shortwave Service)
- ☐ CBC Northern Services
- ☐ NewsWorld (cable news service similar to CNN in the USA)

As you can see Radio Canada International or RCI has been returned to the CBC from Foreign Affairs at a cost of \$15-million per year. RCI was removed from the CBC several years ago by the previous Conservative government. The Liberals now in power have seen fit to return RCI to its old home. This additional burden will be added to the CBC's current budget. The CBC will seemingly have to find this \$15-million in its already shrinking budget to keep RCI on the air. The CBC presently supplies all of RCI programming except for one program and that may go.

The first commission looking into the CBC, headed by John Godfrey, is already in place. The commission is looking into the operations of the CBC. Their job will be to recommend how the CBC can cut back costs in order to survive in the years to come. The commission is looking at

all aspects of the operations at the CBC from its structure, to the operations and distribution of its various services. To give you an idea of how far the commission is going, have a look at how the CBC delivers its Television services. It seems that CBC spends about \$100,000,000 per year to transmit its television signals to all of Canada. This includes electric bills, tower construction etc. The head of the commission asks why would they spend that many dollars a year when about 75% of Canadians now receive their television services on cable fed lines. Why the commission wants to know should the CBC spend millions of dollars to transmit signals, when they are only serving 25% of the viewing audience?

As you see the first commission's report will no doubt have a major impact on how and what the CBC will be doing as we approach the 21st century. The second commission will look into the very heart of the CBC. This group will examine the Mandate of the CBC. The commission has yet to be formed but as it progresses through its hearings and reviews, they will examine why and if the CBC should exist. The CBC as we know it may be transformed into a new service much different from what we now have. The major impact will most likely fall on the Television and Shortwave services. The latter may disappear altogether. RCI was supposed to disappear several years ago, but then Prime Minister Brian Mulroney, in an off the cuff statement said he would not let the Shortwave service disappear as rumoured. "Rumoured" is an interesting word as his own government had already killed the Shortwave service on paper. The Prime Minister's statement sent the bureaucrats scrambling to save the service and the Prime Minister's face.

As Television is the biggest drag on the CBC's finances the mandate and the way it delivers service will be closely examined. You can count on seeing big changes in the Television services both English and French. These services were to quote the Minister responsible for the CBC, Heritage Minister Michel Dupuy, "...the same structure as they had in the one-channel universe...and now in the 300-channel universe". We have gone from rabbit ears to satellites and the CBC seems to have fallen behind to many Canadians. There are calls to disband the CBC and sell it off to the highest bidders. These may seem like a radical point of view, but at a cost of over \$1.1-billion next year, the CBC will be forced to change and come into line with the current financial and technological times. The Federal government is cutting costs in all areas and the CBC will not be able to escape these cuts.

The CBC may evolve into a more National Service and all local programming may disappear from the airwaves. This National Service would try to tie Canada together (the original idea of why the CBC was formed). The CBC will become to Canada in the 21st century what the railway was in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The CBC will tie Canada together by delivering services that Canadians want and inform all regions about each other's concerns and hopes. This service may become a digital service, satellite fed to Canadians, replacing the present system of transmitters and rebroadcasting stations that go from sea to sea to sea in Canada today. If the CBC does not start taking a hard look at the future the corporation may find itself without the funding it needs to establish a more modern service that will meet the needs of Canadians in the 21st century. This lack of fore sight, as well as an attitude of what was good enough in 1960 is good enough in 1995 may well kill the CBC faster than government budget cuts.

With all of this gloom and doom, one can well imagine that employees at the CBC are on pins and needles wondering what will happen. One CBC employee in Winnipeg summed up his feelings in one word: "confused". Another employee said that this was the worst budget in three years of bad budgets for the CBC. If there are to be cuts of between 25 and 33 per cent to staffing levels as the CBC "right sizes", the next three years will be rocky ones for all staff at the CBC. At present many staff including well known on-air personalities are working on a contract basis. Many of these contracts are due in the next 24 months. You can rest assured that many of these contracts will not be renewed or salary cuts will have to be taken if they are renewed.

As you can see these are rough times at the CBC, and things are probably going to get rougher over the next two or three years. A new or revised mandate coupled with massive changes in services and the way they are delivered, will radically change the CBC as we know it today. With suggestions from selling off all or parts of the CBC, to putting commercials on the commercial free radio services combined with rapid technological change, the CBC will change before the turn of the century. For those of you who are loyal listeners to the CBC your programming and the way you receive the signals from the CBC may soon be changed permanently. In some cases, in particular the Shortwave service, you may see services disappear altogether. As the man once said stay tuned for further updates as they are available. The dead air you are about to hear may not be a test of the service but a real emergency. Unfortunately you may have to tune in another frequency for instructions on what to do.