

Canada's broadcasting policy and employment: FRPC research note

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Introduction

The government of Canada has presented the House of Commons with new legislation concerning broadcasting. Though written in a 'technologically neutral' manner at the time, the 1991 *Broadcasting Act* did not specifically envisage how radio and television services that emerged in the first half of the 1900s might be offered to Canadians via the Internet. Bill C-11, the *Online Streaming Act*, proposes to specifically incorporate some online broadcasting services by changing Canada's broadcasting policy and the CRTC's responsibilities for implementing this policy.

Unfortunately, Bill C-11's proposals do not correct a critical gap in the 1991 *Act*: the absence of any accountability requirement for the CRTC to report on its implementation of Parliament's broadcasting policy.

Take the issue of employment, for example. When Parliament was considering the 1991 *Act* it may have noticed that broadcast employment was decreasing: from 40,828 full-time or equivalent jobs in 1990, to 39,561 jobs in 1991 (1,267 jobs lost, or a 3.1% decrease). Parliament therefore included in its new 1991 broadcasting statute the first specific reference to employment. Subsection 3(1)(d)(iii) declared as the broadcasting policy for Canada that

The Canadian broadcasting system should

...

(iii) **through its programming and the employment opportunities arising out of its operations, serve the needs and interests, and reflect the circumstances and aspirations, of Canadian men, women and children**, including equal rights, the linguistic duality and multicultural and multiracial nature of Canadian society and the special place of aboriginal peoples within that society

From 1991 to 2020 employment levels at regulated broadcasting services¹ increased by 27.5%, or 10,351 positions.² Yet employment by licensed Canadian programming services – the companies that produce news, sports and other entertainment programs – actually decreased over this period, by 6,056 full-time or equivalent positions or 21%: while cable or distribution companies created employment opportunities, radio and television programming services were shedding them.

It may be that the loss of thousands of jobs at Canadian programming services was inevitable – new technologies may have enabled people to be replaced by computers and other tools, for instance. Similarly, new ways of providing programming may have enabled broadcasters to employ fewer staff: of the 157 discretionary television programming services whose 2020 financial information was published

¹ Being licensed public and private radio and television undertakings, discretionary programming services and broadcast distribution undertakings (or BDUs).

² Data are from the CRTC's annual statistical and financial summaries for licensed radio, television, discretionary services and BDUs.

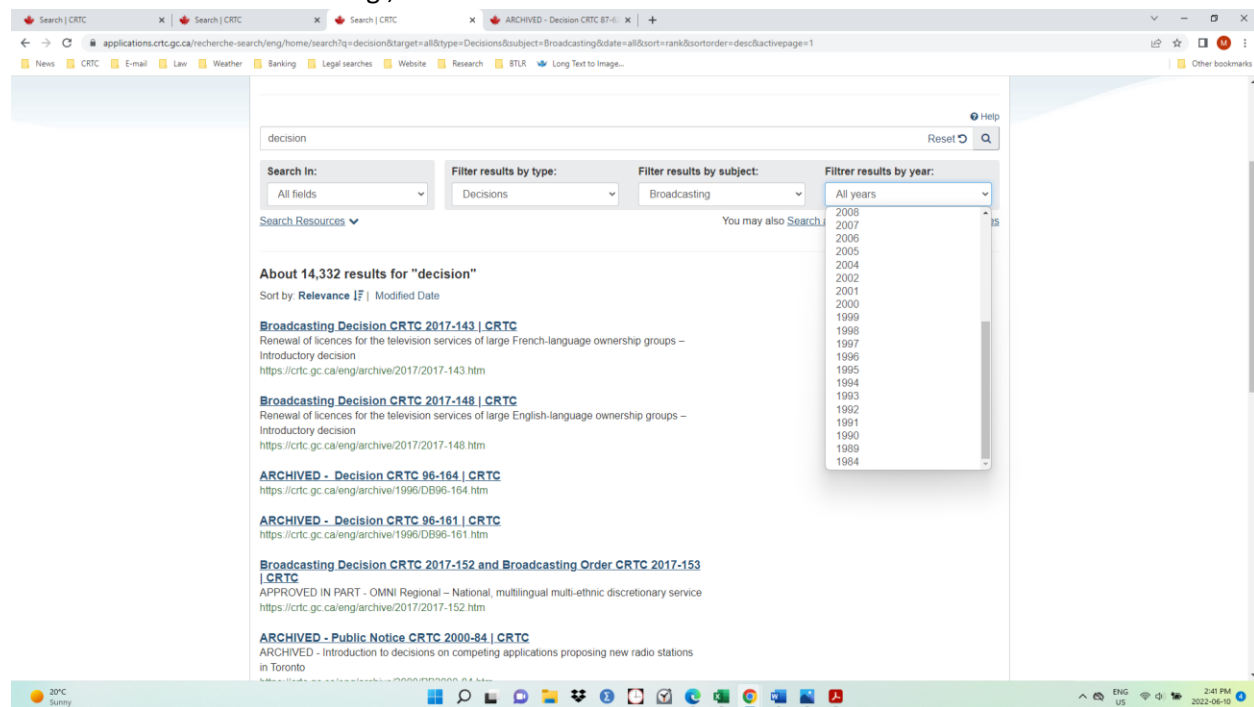
by the CRTC, for example, 61 reported employing zero staff (and of these, 16 made more than \$1 million in revenues in 2019/20).³

It may also be, however, that disinterest by the CRTC – the “single independent authority” responsible for implementing Parliament’s broadcasting policy – in implementing the employment-opportunities provision in subsection 3(1)(d)(iii) contributed to the shrinking number of employment opportunities in Canada’s regulated audiovisual sector. One way of assessing the CRTC’s commitment to or interest in implementing Parliament’s broadcasting policy is to examine the decisions it issues.

Approach

The Forum used the CRTC’s online search engine to review decisions that referred to employment opportunities or jobs.

A simple search using the CRTC’s online search engine for “decisions”⁴ yielded a result of 14,332 ‘decisions’ about ‘broadcasting’, from 1984 to 2022:



The CRTC’s search engine permits searches for specific phrases when the phrase is enclosed within quotation marks. Searching the CRTC’s broadcasting decisions for the phrase, “employment opportunities”, yielded 124 results: in other words, 0.9% of the total, 14, 332 decisions listed by the CRTC’s search engine referred to ‘employment opportunities’. To put this another way, 99% of the CRTC’s decisions did not refer to employment opportunities at all.

³ FRPC analysis of the CRTC’s *Individual Discretionary and On-Demand Services: Statistical and Financial Summaries, 2016-2022*.

⁴ The search term was “Decision”; the filtered result was for “Decisions”; the subject was limited to “Broadcasting”, and the period was set for “All years”.

The first 32 of the 124 decisions listed by the search engine did not refer to employment, but to the importance of appropriate reflection and diversity in employment practices. The text used in [Broadcasting Decision CRTC 2003-210](#) was typical of these decisions:

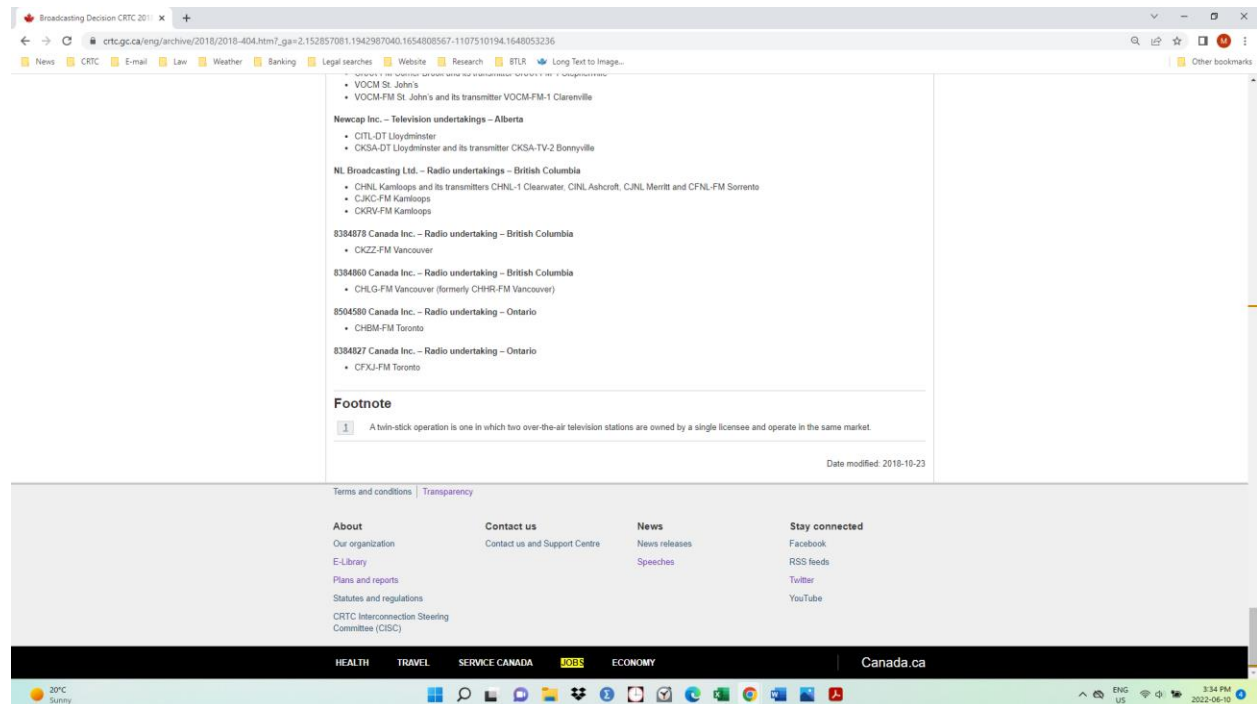
Cultural diversity

21. Section 3(1)(d)(iii) of the Broadcasting Act stipulates that the Canadian broadcasting system should "through its programming and the employment opportunities arising out of its operations, serve the needs and interests, and reflect the circumstances and aspirations, of Canadian men, women and children, including equal rights, the linguistic duality and multicultural and multiracial nature of Canadian society and the special place of aboriginal peoples within that society".

22. More broadly, the Commission expects the licensee to endeavour, through its programming and employment opportunities, to reflect the presence in Canada of cultural and racial minorities and Aboriginal peoples. The Commission further expects the licensee to ensure that the on-screen portrayal of such groups is accurate, fair and free of stereotypes.

None of the 32 decisions reviewed quoted statements from broadcasters about the number of employment opportunities offered by their broadcasting services.

Having spent several hours reviewing CRTC decisions without finding a substantive reference to the number of employment opportunities available in broadcasting, we decided to look for broadcasting decisions referring to "jobs": as the CRTC's website pages include a reference to "jobs" with the federal government (at the bottom of the page), however, this search returned misleading results as well, listing decisions whose only reference to "job" was through the term enabling those interested to see jobs posted by the federal government:



We therefore searched for “new jobs” and “new employment opportunities”, on the theory that the CRTC might quote such information in its decisions. The CRTC’s search engine identified four decisions that used the term, “new jobs”, of which two (87-62 and 97-85) referred to the planned or potential establishment of new jobs:

“new jobs”: 4 results
Broadcasting Decision CRTC 87-62: “Vidéotron stated that its major contribution in the area of news would be a new public affairs and news program to be broadcast beginning September 1987 from 7:30 a.m. to 9:00 a.m. Monday to Friday. This program represents new funding of \$8 million over 5 years and will lead to the creation of 20 new jobs, including 5 journalist positions , under the full responsibility of the news department. Vidéotron stated that it wished to repatriate francophone viewers during time slots when there currently is no French-language television service.”
Broadcasting Decision CRTC 97-85: “According to TVA-CW, the intangible benefits to result from these applications include the overall enhancement of English-language broadcasting in Quebec, and the potential creation of 75 new jobs in the Quebec communication sector.”
Broadcasting Decision CRTC 2004-538 “12. In its reply, the licensee noted that the approval of its request to amend the licence of CFTF-TV would not only have the effect of providing the communities it serves with a new, distinct local and regional news service, but would also create new jobs in television in the region and would allow the population of eastern Quebec and the Francophones of New Brunswick access to a level of news information comparable to that offered to viewers in other regions of Quebec. The licensee added that in the past it had focused on increasing its audience by adding new transmitters rather than producing local news. It mentioned that the CFTF-TV service area now reaches approximately 500,000 persons.”
Broadcasting Decision CRTC 2013-349 “8. One individual submitted that before allowing non-Canadian African channels to operate in Canada, the Commission should encourage and support local African channels that intend to broadcast the same type of content as that of the proposed services but have yet to commence operations. Another individual submitted that if AMET-TV were successful, the creation of new jobs would ensue, and visible minorities would have a station through which they could connect with culture from back home.”

In response to an inquiry for CRTC decisions with the phrase, “new employment opportunities”, the CRTC’s search engine returned “0 result for “new employment opportunities””.

Results

This somewhat elementary review of the number of CRTC decisions that refer to employment opportunities or jobs found that a very small percentage – less than 1% - of the thousands of broadcasting decisions issued by the CRTC since the mid-1980s used phrases such as “new jobs”, “new employment opportunities” or “employment opportunities”. The CRTC’s search engine identified just four CRTC broadcasting decisions that referred to “new jobs”, and of these just two referred to “new jobs” in the context of future plans.

Conclusion

The absence of information in CRTC broadcasting decisions about employment opportunities or jobs created by or being proposed by broadcasters may indicate that the employment-opportunities aspect of subsection 3(1)(d)(iii) is low on the CRTC's list of priorities.

The Forum's recommendations to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage therefore included a recommendation that the CRTC be required to report annually on its implementation of the broadcasting policy for Canada – including numbers of full-time or equivalent employment opportunities by those regulated by the Commission. The absence of objective information about the implementation of Canada's broadcasting policy leaves Canadians and Parliamentarians alike with little evidence to determine and evaluate the success of Canada's broadcasting legislation.