Acting in the Name of Culture?
Organized Labour Campaigns for Canadian Dramatic Programming

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Abstract: This article has two main objectives: to identify a link between organized labour representing English-language independent Canadian film and television production workers and developments in Canadian broadcasting policy, and to analyze the complex role of labour within the Canadian broadcasting policy network. The author uses union interventions around the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission’s 1999 Television Policy and the decline in Canadian dramatic programming as a case study to analyze the strategy and efficacy of labour’s involvement in the broadcasting policymaking process. She argues that labour’s adoption of a coalition framework, with the formation of the Coalition of Canadian Audio-visual Unions, has positively impacted labour’s power as policy actors in the Canadian broadcasting policy sphere.

Résumé : Cet article a deux objectifs principaux : d’une part, identifier le lien qui existe entre les politiques sur la radiodiffusion canadienne et les syndicats qui représentent les travailleurs anglophones au Canada dans les secteurs de la production indépendante télévisuelle et cinématographique ; d’autre part, analyser le rôle complexe de la main-d’œuvre au sein du réseau d’action publique pour la radiodiffusion canadienne. L’auteur a recours à des interventions syndicales qui se rapportent à la Politique télévisuelle de 1999 du Conseil de la radiodiffusion et des télécommunications canadiennes ainsi qu’au déclin dans la production de programmation dramatique au Canada pour effectuer une étude de cas sur la stratégie et l’efficacité entourant la participation de la main-d’œuvre dans la formulation de politiques en radiodiffusion. L’auteur soutient que l’entente réalisée par la main-d’œuvre dans le dossier de la formation de la Coalition canadienne des syndicats de l’audiovisuel a eu un effet positif sur ses capacités à contribuer aux politiques de radiodiffusion canadienne.

Keywords: Broadcasting policy; Regulation/CRTC; Film and television unions

The Canadian television broadcasting system balances both cultural and industrial objectives with the notion of the public interest at the centre of its operations. In achieving this balance, the Canadian broadcasting policy process relies on both

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private and public interests to participate in the development and evaluation of policy and regulation related to Canada’s public airwaves. Within policy studies, organized labour is typically classified as a representative of civil society, rather than a stakeholder representing private interests. Using policy network theory as a framework, my research has two main objectives: to identify a link between organized labour representing English-language independent Canadian film and television production workers and developments in Canadian broadcasting policy, and to analyze the complex role of labour within the Canadian broadcasting policy network.

The following questions guide the inquiry: How does broadcasting policy affect labour market conditions for the workers who are the Canadians in Canadian content? How do their labour organizations attempt to influence policy directions, and what strategies do they use to do so? What effect does globalization have on employment conditions and policy governing the domestic television production industry? Do the various labour organizations engage with the policy process solely as representatives of their members’ interests or as representatives of civil society working toward broader social and cultural goals?

Canadian content regulations, designed by the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) to contribute cultural benefits to the public-service broadcasting model, are a key component of the Canadian broadcasting system. Canadian dramatic programming, as a primary vehicle for the expression of Canadian creativity and storytelling, has historically been a cultural pillar of Canadian content regulations. Canadian content is measured by the number of key creative positions held by Canadians on a project, and thus also has industrial implications. In 1999, the CRTC introduced significant changes to the regulations that affect the amount and type of Canadian content conventional broadcasters are required to schedule, which the unions argue is directly responsible for a recent and marked decline in original Canadian dramatic programming.

The Alliance of Canadian Cinema, Television and Radio Artists (ACTRA), the Directors Guild of Canada (DGC), the Writers Guild of Canada (WGC), the Communications, Energy and Paperworkers Union (CEP), and the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees (IATSE) each have their own relationship to the Canadian film and television industry and cultural policy interventions. The methodology includes analysis of CRTC and federal government documents, stakeholder policy submissions, and interviews conducted with key union representatives. The unions’ independent contributions to the public consultation process leading up to the enactment of the 1999 Television Policy focused almost exclusively on their members’ interests. I will argue that the release of the 1999 Television Policy led to labour’s adoption of a coalition strategy in the formation of the Coalition of Canadian Audio-visual Unions (CCAU). The CCAU marks a shift in both policy strategy and discourse for the unions participating in the Canadian broadcasting policy network.
Canadian film and television workers in a globalized industry

Film and television production is labour intensive; up to 85% of a production’s budget will be accounted for in labour costs (Randle & Culkin, 2005). In a content driven, highly mediated society, the film and television production sector is an employment driver. The past decade has seen significant growth in direct full-time-equivalent jobs in film and television production, from 20,100 in 1993-94 to 54,500 in 2002-03 (CFTPA, 2006). However, statistics from the Canadian Film and Television Production Association indicate a decline in full-time employment levels in recent years, with 2004-05 numbers falling below those of the late 1990s, down to 46,000 (CFTPA, 2006).

Unionized workers do most domestic dramatic television production and almost all foreign-service production in Canada. Creative teams include writers, directors, actors, and a support crew of camera, art, grip, lighting, sound, hair, makeup, wardrobe, special effects, and post-production departments. The creative teams are supported by administrative professionals in production and post-production. An expansive network of vendors ranging from equipment and raw stock suppliers to caterers, hotels, florists, and car rental agencies supports the industry as a whole.

Five national labour organizations represent almost every worker category specific to the English-language independent film and television production sector. The Alliance of Canadian Cinema, Television and Radio Artists (ACTRA) traces its roots back to performers organizing in the early 1940s and currently represents approximately 18,000 Canadian on- and off-screen performers in English-language recorded media (ACTRA, 2005). The Directors Guild of Canada (DGC), founded in 1962, currently represents more than 3,800 key creative and logistical personnel, including directors, assistant directors, location managers, production designers, production managers, editors, and accountants across Canada (DGC, 2005). The Writers Guild of Canada (WGC) was created in the 1960s as an association of Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) radio writers and currently represents more than 1,800 Canadian screenwriters working in film, television, radio, and multimedia (Martiri, 2005; WGC, 2005). The Communications, Energy and Paperworkers Union (CEP) was formed in 1992 through the merger of the Canadian Paperworkers Union, the Communication and Electrical Workers of Canada, and the Chemical Workers Union. It is the third-largest private-sector union in Canada, with a total membership of over 150,000 (CEP, 2005). The CEP is Canada’s largest media union, representing over 20,000 workers in the film, television, radio, magazine, book publishing, and new-media industries, and it represents approximately 2,000 technicians from the English-language independent film and television production sector through locals NABET 700 in Toronto and ACFC 2020 in Vancouver (CEP, 2005). Finally, of the five unions, only the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees, Moving Picture Technicians, Artists and Allied Crafts of the United States, Its Territories and Canada (IATSE) has national jurisdiction that is not entirely Canadian in its constitution. Headquartered in New York, IATSE has 105,000
members in animation, computer-generated imagery, theatre, post-production, film projection, and trade show and exhibition staging across Canada and the U.S. (IATSE, 2005). Specific to the independent film and television production sector in Canada, IATSE locals represent approximately 14,000 technicians. As with the CEP locals, these technicians include set decorators, scenic artists, painters, carpenters, grips, electricians, special effects technicians, property masters, hair stylists, makeup artists, costume designers and wardrobe personnel, transportation drivers, sound recordists, script supervisors, craft service personnel, and production coordinators (Lewis, 2005). The unions generally work in a collaborative fashion; a fully unionized Canadian dramatic television series will regularly sign contracts with at least four if not all five of the labour organizations on a single project. It is not unusual for a dramatic television series to directly employ 70 cast and core production crew, supported by upwards of 15 post-production workers who, in the case of dramatic series production, contribute to the production of one one-hour episode every 10 working days (an average shooting schedule).

In 2004-05, independent film and television production, defined as those productions not undertaken in-house by private broadcasters or the CBC, accounted for the largest share of the Canadian production industry, worth $3.4 billion of the total $4.5 billion in total production volume (CFTPA, 2006). There are two driving sectors to the independent film and television industry in Canada. Domestic independent television production, or Canadian content, represented 37% of total production volume in 2004-05. Foreign-service independent productions, defined as those film or video productions shot in Canada by foreign studios and independent producers, represented 33% of total production volume for the same period (CFTPA, 2006).

Foreign-service work is a significant contributor to the Canadian English-language independent film and television production sector. Indeed, some would argue problematically so, wherein this sector is considered a cornerstone despite factors preventing Canada from exerting any real control over the volume of work on an ongoing basis. Although Canada enjoys several advantages in drawing U.S. foreign-service-sector work, including geographical proximity, favourable currency exchange rates, developed infrastructure, and a federal film and television labour tax credit program augmented by additional provincial labour tax credits, these combined factors lose their power in the context of a globalized industry. Although the Canadian dollar continues to operate at a favourable exchange rate to the U.S. dollar, the exchange margin has been unstable and generally shrinking in recent years as a result of the declining American currency (MMK Consulting Inc., 2005). Other parts of the globe are aggressively competing for the lucrative U.S. foreign-service sector, offering exchange rates comparable to, or in many cases better than, the Canadian dollar. It is not only the migration of work to distant foreign-service areas that poses challenges to Canada’s film and television industry. The issue of runaway production, wherein U.S. labour groups charge Canada with stealing jobs that “belong” in the U.S., has sparked debate and a wave of filming incentives within the United States. States including New
Mexico, Louisiana, Hawaii, Illinois, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, South Carolina, and New York have all recently released new tax credit and incentive programs designed to stimulate local production levels (Neil Craig Associates, 2004). It is worth noting that the Canadian Film and Television Production Association links the decrease in the number of full-time jobs in the production sector for 2004-05 to the 23% decline in foreign-service production for the same period (CFTPA, 2006).

What Canada continues to hold as leverage in this highly competitive environment is the human quotient. Canadian crews are now regarded as some of the most professional and highly skilled in the world. The DGC and IATSE are regularly and routinely contracted on American productions to provide creative, logistical, and technical personnel. Few foreign workers are brought in to replace Canadian positions in these jurisdictions, and generally only those key creative positions attached to the financing of a project, such as a director, production designer, or cinematographer. However, foreign-service work does not benefit all unionized Canadian film and television workers equally.

ACTRA, the WGC, and CEP do not fare quite as well in having their members employed on foreign-service productions. Many shows are written in the U.S. under Writers Guild of America contracts, and no WGC members are employed whatsoever. U.S. shows often come with American principal or ensemble cast members already attached. While ACTRA must grant permits for non-ACTRA members to work in its jurisdiction, and productions must agree to hire ACTRA members for any day players, minor roles, and background performers, ACTRA is often under immense pressure to cede to U.S. cast demands from producers and other labour organizations in the interests of the industry as a whole. Finally, as a result of IATSE’s strong presence in the U.S. and deeply developed relationship with many of the major studios, IATSE has generally benefited more from American service work than CEP locals.

The domestic sector is thus a vital source of employment for many unionized Canadian film and television industry workers. The domestic production base is required in order to provide stability where globalization leaves the foreign-service sector highly volatile. On cultural terms, domestic productions are the only truly Canadian creative space, where total creative control remains in the hands of Canadians. When the Canadian Audio-Visual Certificate Office (CAVCO) and the CRTC determine Canadian content through their points systems, the actual content of the project is not taken into account. What is taken into account are the key creative personnel who create, shape, and bring life to the content—the writer, director, lead performers, director of photography, art director, composer, and picture editor. It is the workers themselves who define Canadian content.

A regulatory framework for Canadian television
The notion of the public interest is at the heart of both governing legislation for the Canadian broadcasting system and the mandate of the federal broadcasting regulator. The public interest is, at its core, an essentially contested concept
subject to social, political, economic, cultural, and historical imperatives. The term “public interest” is used throughout this article to refer to the objectives laid out in the Broadcasting Act and as taken up by the unions. However, in the theoretical tradition of Fraser (1993) and in the interests of furthering a meaningful conversation on this concept within broadcasting policy discourse, I propose a more useful term would be “publics’ interests,” indicating the heterogeneous and diverse range of concerns and voices the Canadian broadcasting system is mandated to represent in both its structure and its content.

The Broadcasting Act is explicit in the expansive list of goals the system is mandated to meet in the public interest. In outlining cultural and industrial objectives, the Act declares the broadcasting system to be “a public service essential to the maintenance and enhancement of national identity and cultural sovereignty,” which should “safeguard, enrich and strengthen the cultural, political, social and economic fabric of Canada” through providing employment opportunities and “programming that reflects Canadian attitudes, opinions, ideas, values and artistic creativity” (Canada, 1991, section 3[b], [d][i-iii]).

The CRTC is Canada’s independent, arm’s-length regulatory body governing broadcasting and telecommunications systems, and the nation’s primary venue for the development, implementation, and negotiation of broadcasting policy. Its role as regulator of broadcasting is “to maintain a delicate balance—in the public interest—between the cultural, social and economic goals of the legislation” (CRTC, 2005a). In meeting its objectives, the CRTC seeks public- and private-sector input through a variety of undertakings, including public hearings, calls for submissions, applications, and a complaints process. As gatekeeper for the broadcasting system, the CRTC must ensure both public and private needs are being addressed, using the Broadcasting Act as its legislative beacon.

The genre of dramatic programming, with its potential to operate as a site for expression of Canadian artistic creativity, stories, values, attitudes, and points of view (however defined), has become a cornerstone of the Canadian content regulations that are designed to assist the broadcasting system in meeting its public-interest goals. Canada’s geographical position next to the United States, with the largest entertainment industry in the world, has posed specific challenges in developing and preserving the Canadian-ness in the Canadian broadcasting system. Since U.S. producers and distributors of television programming are able to recover not only their costs but also often generate significant profits within their domestic market, they are able to sell broadcast licence agreements to foreign markets (such as Canada) at significantly reduced rates. This is particularly significant when examining the production of dramatic programming, the most expensive type of programming to undertake. Canadian broadcasters are able to purchase extremely popular U.S. dramatic programming that will guarantee significant advertising revenues at a fraction of the costs of producing original Canadian dramatic programming. As an added disincentive for broadcasters, the size of the Canadian market is a fraction of that of the United States, making it extremely difficult for producers and broadcasters to recoup their costs in the
domestic market, regularly resulting in net losses for this type of programming (McQueen, 2003).

The CRTC has historically emphasized the importance of dramatic programming in meeting the cultural objectives of the Broadcasting Act. In its 1983 policy statement on Canadian content for television, the CRTC discussed the cultural implications of the economic and industrial barriers to the production and exhibition of Canadian dramatic programming.

If Canadians do not use what is one of the world’s most extensive and sophisticated communications systems to speak to themselves—if it serves only for the importation of foreign programs—there is a real and legitimate concern that the country will ultimately lose the means of expressing its identity. Developing a strong Canadian program production capability is no longer a matter of desirability but of necessity. (CRTC, 1983, p. 3)

In promoting the reflection of Canadian points of view, Canadian content regulations dating back to 1970 outline what qualifies as “Canadian” programming and dictate that at least 60% of broadcaster programming overall, and 50% in the evening periods, must qualify as Canadian content (CRTC, 1983). To ensure a variety of programming, particularly drama, in 1983 the CRTC introduced “priority programming” requirements that set programming minimums for Canadian drama, music, and variety programming (CRTC, 1983). Furthermore, in an attempt to ensure such programming was sufficiently financed, the CRTC also set priority programming expenditure requirements as conditions of licence for Canadian conventional broadcasters. Such regulatory initiatives were seen to work toward economic objectives in developing a domestic industry infrastructure as well as cultural concerns in telling Canadian stories from a Canadian perspective (CRTC, 2003).

In 1999 the CRTC took a new direction in its policy rationale, one that much more closely reflected principles associated with a market approach to public policy. Two of the most contentious changes to the regulatory structure under the 1999 Television Policy framework were the expansion of priority programming categories and the removal of broadcaster expenditure requirements (CRTC, 1999a). The expansion of priority programming categories meant that broadcasters could now meet their minimum exhibition requirements for priority programming through such formats as long-form documentaries and “reality” TV shows, genres that are significantly less expensive than drama to produce. Removal of expenditure requirements meant that broadcasters were now free to spend as much or as little as they saw fit on drama and other types of priority programming in meeting the regulatory requirements. The policy reflects a distinct shift toward viewer as consumer rather than viewer as citizen in its explanation for the removal of expenditure requirements.

The Commission believes that, in a competitive environment, licensees require high quality programming to win audience loyalty. . . . The Commission is concerned that the existing expenditure requirements are complex and may not provide licensees with the flexibility they require to adapt their programming strategies to a highly competitive marketplace. (CRTC, 1999a, p. 5)
The power to grant, renew, and set the conditions for broadcasting licences is one of the principal powers of the CRTC. Licence renewals are the most opportune moment for the agency to address issues with broadcaster procedures and practices, hold broadcasters accountable to the CRTC for their commitments made in previous years, and require them to demonstrate their obligation to operate in the public interest (Raboy & Taras, 2004). In keeping with the new emphasis on regulatory flexibility and broadcaster discretion, licence renewals subsequent to the release of the policy revealed little specific emphasis on the importance of original Canadian dramatic programming. In 2001, the CRTC renewed both Global and CTV's licences for the full seven-year term. Conditions of licence require both Global and CTV to broadcast an average of three hours per week of prime-time drama or long-form documentary in years 3 and 4 of the licence term and four hours thereafter, only half of which is required to be original (first-run) programming (CRTC, 2001a). Despite the fact that CTV's schedule reflected a complete absence of Canadian priority programming on three nights of the week, and half of what was programmed was aired on Saturday night, the Commission's only regulatory directive was that it “expects that each station's schedule will reflect a reasonable distribution of priority programming both throughout the week and the broadcast year” (CRTC, 2001b, p. 7).

“And action!” — Organized labour intervenes

ACTRA, the DGC, WGC, and CEP have been key policy actors in the development and contestation of the CRTC's 1999 Television Policy. Before the specifics of the case study are examined, it is important to briefly situate the unions as policy actors within the Canadian cultural policy landscape.

Independently and individually, ACTRA, the CEP, DGC, and WGC are all active actors in Canadian cultural policy networks. These unions’ policy interventions, campaigns, and consultations include participation in the development of key funding programs such as Telefilm, the Canadian Television Fund, international co-production guidelines, and tax credits programs; legislation such as the Copyright Act and Status of the Artist legislation; and other industry issues including broadcasting ownership, media convergence and concentration, funding for the CBC, and cultural diversity and international trade.

IATSE is the only one of the five unions that does not include political action and policy intervention as a key component of its organizational strategy. Despite its industrial strength and size, IATSE is primarily a wages-and-benefits organization in Canada. IATSE has only recently made its first policy intervention as a national labour organization with its submission to the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage's Feature Film Policy Review (Lewis, 2005).

ACTRA, the DGC, WGC, and CEP were all involved in the public consultation process that led to the formation of the 1999 Television Policy. The DGC called for the CRTC to exercise all the regulatory tools in its policy kit to increase both broadcaster financing and scheduling of first-run Canadian entertainment programming (drama, variety, children's, music, and dance programs) in prime time (CRTC, 1998a). The WGC proposed three changes: 1) financing minimums
for programming development set as conditions of licence for the broadcasters upon licence renewal; 2) a change to the CRTC’s points system for determining Canadian content eligibility wherein a Canadian writer would be a required rather than an optional component; and 3) a request to raise the minimum points required to qualify as Canadian content from 6 out of 10 to 8 out of 10 under CRTC regulations (CRTC, 1998b). The beginnings of cohesion between labour organizations were evidenced when the WGC stated its support for the DGC’s proposal, but it did not go into great detail in that regard, focusing primarily on issues specific to writers. ACTRA also supported the DGC’s proposal to increase financing and scheduling of Canadian entertainment programming, but further muddied the voice of labour by proposing a different change to the points system from that proposed by the WGC. ACTRA’s revision would award two points for the lead performer and one each for the second and third if Canadian, as well as increase the minimum points to qualify as Canadian from 6 out of 10 to 10 out of 12 (CRTC, 1998c).

The CEP took a major departure from the proposals of the other three organizations representing workers in the English-language independent production sector. Framing its proposal as a “business case,” the CEP argued for increased broadcaster in-house production and broadcaster access to public funds through Telefilm and other initiatives. The CEP argued that if the broadcasters were allowed to own the Canadian content rather than just licence it, the ability for the broadcaster to “bicycle” the production through the broadcasting system would ultimately result in significantly increased profitability and thus increased desire to undertake more Canadian content programming, fulfilling both cultural and industrial objectives of the Broadcasting Act. Furthermore, once this system was in place, the CEP argued the CRTC could reasonably increase Canadian content minimum to 70% and still have broadcasters operate on a profitable basis. With a relatively small proportion of its membership working in the independent production sector, the CEP did not feel this model would have an unduly negative impact on its membership, although it admitted to the Commission that it had not consulted with other members of the independent production sector prior to filing its submission (CRTC, 1998d).

IATSE made no submission or intervention at all with regard to the television policy review. For those unions that did, the tendency for each organization to put forth proposals that benefited its particular membership and conflicted or side-stepped those proposed by their labour colleagues would not serve any of the organizations well in the long run.

As noted, the release of the CRTC’s 1999 Television Policy brought significant changes to the regulatory environment. Removal of expenditure requirements for broadcasters and expansion of the definition of priority programming were the results, with no changes to broadcaster in-house production emphasis, Canadian content qualifications, scheduling requirements, eligibility, or funding access as requested by the various unions. According to the DGC, the CRTC’s 1999 Television Policy was labour’s biggest defeat in the policy arena (Brand, 2005).
"Cut! Going again!" — Take 2: Formation of the CCAU

The release and impact of the 1999 Television Policy had a significant impact on how the unions try to persuade the government to pursue the policies they advocate (Pross, 1992). Most striking was the adoption of a national labour-based coalition strategy, operating as the Coalition of Canadian Audio-visual Unions (CCAU).

The unions’ new strategy fits clearly within what Sabatier (1991) terms an advocacy coalition framework. Under the emergent policy environment, the idea of the sectoral policy network has shifted toward issue networks, characterized by interest groups or advocacy coalitions that engage with specific concerns rather than the sector as a whole, and composed of a network of groups that share a similar perspective or basic set of beliefs on an issue (Richardson, 2000; Sabatier, 1991).

The Writers Guild of Canada first sounded the alarm bells on the industrial impact of the CRTC’s 1999 Television Policy. Since the development of dramatic programming, and particularly series television, begins many months and even years before the engagement of professionals related to the production stage, writers were the first film and television workers to feel the impact of the new policy direction. The WGC immediately began to compile statistics from its database detailing the decline in dramatic production. It initiated discussion with other labour organizations almost immediately, although several years would go by before labour really coalesced around the issue in a cohesive manner (Martiri, 2005).

While writers were the first to feel the industrial impact of the new policy direction, not long after the effects were being felt by all workers involved with Canadian dramatic programming. In 1999 the total number of hours of Canadian drama broadcast was 753. By 2000, that number had dropped to 661.5; in 2001, it fell again to 587; and by 2002, the total number of hours of Canadian drama broadcast had fallen a total of 36%, to 486 (CCAU, 2003a). The drama issue provided a common starting point on which all the unions could agree to begin to articulate a united policy position.

There is general agreement among DGC, ACTRA, WGC, and CEP that Heritage Minister Sheila Copps played a key role in the reformation of labour’s strategy in the broadcasting policy arena. With the encouragement and support of the Minister of Canadian Heritage, the unions began initial discussions in early 2002 on the value of pooling their resources and speaking with one cohesive voice to the government. Undertaking the advice of the Minister, and recognizing the potential to gain both power and influence in a coalition strategy, the WGC, CEP, ACTRA, and DGC were instrumental in organizing what is now a broad-based labour coalition of those organizations as well as the American Federation of Musicians (AFM-Canada), representing musicians; Union des artistes (UdA), representing French-speaking performers; Association des réalisateurs et réalisatrices du Québec (ARRQ), representing French-language directors in Quebec; Alliance québécoise des techniciens de l’image et du son (AQTIS), representing all “behind the camera” personnel in Quebec (AQTIS, 2006); and Société des auteurs de radio télévision et cinéma (SARTEC), representing French-language
writers. Collectively this coalition claims to represent 50,000 cultural artists in Canada’s film and television industry (CCAU, 2005a). The coalition is the first of its kind in Canada—and noteworthy for both its formation and its strategy.  

IATSE was invited to join the CCAU but declined. Coalition members speculate that IATSE’s American affiliation prevents it from participating in a coalition that is only concerned with Canadian dramatic programming and not the foreign-service sector, or that since IATSE does relatively little domestic production, there is no significant imperative for the organization to put time or energy into the issue. From IATSE’s perspective, it has little interest in joining the CCAU, as the CCAU’s arguments tend to rely heavily on cultural values and strong regulatory structures, whereas IATSE’s focus lies more in business and economic models that do not necessarily include strong state intervention in the film and television industries (Lewis, 2005, interview). IATSE recognizes that domestic production levels have a much more significant impact on the members of the CCAU than on most IATSE members working in the independent film and television production sector, and thus the CCAU views the issues facing the industry from a different perspective. However, IATSE’s Director of Canadian Affairs considers the CCAU’s focus on domestic production at the exclusion of the foreign-service sector “myopic” (Lewis, 2005, interview).

Structure and strategy of the CCAU
The resources, structure, and strategy of the CCAU impact the coalition’s policy capacity (Pross, 1992). The CCAU is an ad-hoc coalition, co-chaired by the VP—Media of the CEP and Directrice des affaires publiques of the Union des artistes (UdA). It has no formal meeting schedule, mandate, constitution, membership guidelines, or financial structure. The CCAU describes itself as an issue-based coalition, with a flexibility that enables the coalition to remain adaptable and responsive to the policy environment. At present, the coalition is focused on Canadian dramatic programming and related issues. All work by the CCAU is done collaboratively and in a consensus-based model, although the different unions do play different roles within the coalition.

The Writers Guild reports that its database system is the source for much research material and statistical information related to the domestic industry. As writers, the WGC edits many of the submissions the CCAU has made to various reporting bodies, ministerial offices, and the CRTC (Martiri, 2005). The DGC has the longest history with political lobbying in Ottawa; it does a great deal of the public consultations and direct lobbying efforts. The DGC also brought regulatory legal expert Peter Grant of the internationally recognized McCarthy Tétrault law firm to the table as an outside resource in research and legal affairs in shaping the CCAU’s policy proposals. The CEP is relatively new to lobbying specifically for the independent film and television production sector, but has substantial experience in lobbying generally and, with the clout of representing 150,000 workers across Canada, is “prepared to pound the table or the pavement” more vehemently than either the DGC or WGC (Murdoch, 2005). ACTRA draws on the celebrity status of its membership and consistently engages high-profile members such as
Sarah Polley, Gordon Pinsent, R. H. Thompson, Colin Mochrie, Rick Mercer, and Paul Gross to attract media attention in putting a public face on the issues as well as participate in committee hearings, lobby days, and dinners with key cabinet ministers, agencies, and critics in promoting its message (Thompson, 2005).

The CCAU takes full credit for identifying the issue of a decline in Canadian dramatic programming as a policy priority. The CCAU entered onto the broadcasting policy landscape in July 2002 with the release of its first position paper, outlining the effect of the 1999 Television Policy on Canadian dramatic programming and the importance of the genre in meeting both cultural and industrial goals of the Canadian broadcasting system (CCAU, 2002). In October 2002, the CRTC commissioned former CTV president Trina McQueen to examine the issue of English-language Canadian dramatic programming. The CCAU filed a preliminary version of its second report (its first major research report), *The Crisis in Canadian Drama*, with McQueen, and subsequently filed the final version at 140 pages directly with the Minister of Canadian Heritage. Taking the CRTC’s 1999 Television Policy as the central problem facing the public-service model of Canadian broadcasting, the report evidenced the decline in dramatic programming, poor scheduling practices of the major broadcasters, an increase in the amount of priority programming other than drama, and a decline in broadcaster expenditures on dramatic programming and compared the situation in Canada to other countries with a strong regulatory framework in place. The CCAU expanded in great detail upon the solutions proposed in its brief four-page introductory paper of the previous year, calling for public hearings on the issue, increased funding from both the state and broadcasters for the genre, reinstatement of broadcaster expenditure requirements, greater transparency in broadcaster reporting for scheduling practices, and introduction of an incentive package designed to encourage broadcasters to develop and schedule Canadian drama (CCAU, 2003a).

McQueen’s findings, released in 2003, cemented the issue on the broadcasting policy agenda as a high priority, supporting the arguments posited by the unions and essentially charging the current system as having failed in its goals to operate in the public interest. Furthermore, the report fully recognized the economics of Canadian dramatic programming and dismissed arguments based on a market rationale.

No broadcaster has ever made money on drama. It exists entirely and only because of political and regulatory will . . . It’s hard to reconcile the reality of our viewing with the objectives of the Broadcasting Act . . . Drama is the most appealing form of television for most Canadians. If they are not watching Canadian drama, it is hard to see how the Act is being upheld. (McQueen, 2003, p. 10)

McQueen’s recognition of the problem was further supported by the release of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage’s 2003 major report on Canadian broadcasting. Identifying the regulatory framework as a key component in meeting the cultural and social objectives of the Canadian broadcasting system, *Our Cultural Sovereignty: The Second Century of Canadian Broadcasting* recom-
mended a full review of the 1999 Television Policy, with a focus on its implications for Canadian dramatic programming (Standing Committee, 2003). The report noted the CCAU’s work as important in identifying the implications of the 1999 Television Policy and accurately representative of the views of a significant segment of the industry.

The Committee notes that the Coalition’s submission to Ms. McQueen is important for two reasons. First, it shows the extent to which Canada’s creators are—as a whole—deeply troubled by the impacts that they have felt in the short time since the introduction of CRTC’s new television policy. Second, it highlights the need for more complete data on scheduling and exhibition. (Standing Committee, 2003, p. 172).

With multiple perspectives agreeing that the lack of drama was problematic for the Canadian public-service broadcasting model, the CRTC issued a public call for comments on the issue in September 2003 (CRTC, 2003). The CCAU filed a follow-up report with the CRTC, Addressing the Crisis in Canadian English-Language Drama, and began to articulate the need for a mix of regulatory and incentive programs to increase the amount, quality, and financing of Canadian dramatic programming (CCAU, 2003b). The CCAU filed a subsequent submission with the CRTC in response to its May 2004 call for comments on a proposed set of dramatic programming incentives designed to stimulate the production and scheduling of original Canadian dramatic programming (CRTC, 2004a). In this submission, the CCAU set forth a detailed and sophisticated model combining regulation and incentives to assist the development and broadcast of Canadian drama (CCAU, 2004). The emphasis, however, in dissenting to the incentive-only program proposed by the CRTC, was on the importance of regulation. While working partially within the established policy paradigm that emphasized regulatory flexibility through recognizing the importance of a combination of incentives and regulations in addressing the issue, the CCAU was nonetheless quite clear in its argument that “the airing of Canadian drama must be seen as a fundamental obligation of all free-to-air television broadcasters, and not simply something that they should be lured into doing. Regulation is by far the most effective tool to achieve results” (CCAU, 2004, p. 3). In November 2004 the CRTC released its final version of the incentive package. Broadcasters that aired original Canadian drama would be rewarded with additional advertising minutes, ranging from 30 seconds to 5 minutes, based on a combination of Canadian content points, production budget per hour of programming, and licence fees (CRTC, 2004b). Although many of the incentive proposals the CCAU recommended as part of an incentive/regulatory mix were reflected in the new program, there was no change at all to the regulatory structure.

In June 2005, the CCAU released its second major research report, focusing on the future of the Canadian broadcasting system should the 1999 Television Policy remain in place. The Need for a Regulatory Safety Net is targeted at the CRTC, which is readying for conventional broadcaster licence renewals starting in 2007. The report evidences that spending on Canadian drama by private broad-
Canadian Journal of Communication, Vol. 31 (3)

castors hit a seven-year low in 2005, down to $53.6 million from $73.0 million in 1998, and identifies two key components of the “regulatory safety net” required to improve the amount of dramatic programming. The first component is a minimum expenditure requirement of gross ad revenue to be spent on Canadian drama, and the second a requirement that each station group commission at least two hours of original 10-point Canadian drama per week (CCAU, 2005a). On the same day the CCAU released its report, Minister of Canadian Heritage Liza Frulla announced that the CRTC will begin reviewing the 1999 Television Policy prior to the upcoming broadcasters’ licence renewals (Vamos, 2005).

In August 2005, the CRTC released a call for comments on a series of proposed viewing and expenditure targets for Canadian drama each private conventional ownership group would have to achieve in order to claim the annual incentives as outlined in the 2004 package (CRTC, 2005b). The CCAU responded in general support of the measures designed to increase expenditures on and viewing to Canadian drama, but reiterated its view that incentives should only operate as a complement to a regulatory framework that includes broadcaster expenditure and scheduling minimums for original Canadian drama. Its submission also problematizes the issue of the procurement process for dramatic programming in Canada and its relationship to ratings, noting that

> drama ratings are inherently unpredictable and are driven by many factors outside a broadcaster’s control. . . . The U.S. TV business is littered with drama and comedy series that were heavily promoted and were scheduled in prime time but which failed to garner an audience. . . . To maximize audience potential . . . we need more investment, better promotion and better time slots . . . we need more financial support for script and concept development. (CCAU, 2005b, pp. 20, 21)

The CRTC released its final version of the viewing and expenditure incentives in January 2006. Although the additional minutes of advertising are tied to meeting viewing and expenditure objectives, the CRTC again did not fundamentally change the regulatory structure as laid out in the 1999 Television Policy (CRTC, 2006a).

**Unions and the public interest**

The industrial effects of a decline in dramatic programming, with particular regard to employment levels, are easily inferred. The CCAU argues that should the CRTC not enact regulatory measures to promote dramatic programming,

> Our dramatic production sector will be lost; new talent will not develop; existing talent will either relocate in another jurisdiction where they can find work opportunities or change profession altogether to support themselves and their families. This will leave Canada lacking the experienced, professional talent pool to make television drama if the regulations change too far in the future. (CCAU, 2003b, p. 10)

Less tangible are the cultural implications of a decline in Canadian drama. The CCAU’s decision to also invoke cultural objectives as a foundational framework in making the case for Canadian drama is intentional and strategic. Eco-
Coles / Organized Labour Campaigns for Canadian Dramatic Programming 533

Economic arguments have their limitations. Economic models apply to some programming formats, such as lifestyle programming, that provide a regular return on investment. As outlined earlier, Canadian drama rarely operates in a positive-return scenario for the broadcasters, and thus is difficult to justify in an economic argument.

Fundamentally, the CCAU rejects a market rationale to govern broadcasting policy. As both the WGC and DGC note, no one is interested in putting the broadcasters out of business or severely hampering their ability to operate profitably (Brand, 2005; Martiri, 2005). However, through invoking notions of the public interest at the core of the mandate of the CRTC and the Broadcasting Act, the CCAU argues that the broadcasters have a responsibility to operate in the public interest as private users of public airwaves, that not every activity a broadcaster undertakes can reasonably expect to be profitable, and that some types of programming, such as Canadian drama, have significant social and cultural benefits that override a market rationale. The CCAU extends the benefits of dramatic programming well beyond the bounds of employment for its combined membership to a tool of social cohesion and a vehicle for the development of national identity.

No other genre of programming has shown itself to have the sustained ability to capture the public imagination in the way that series drama does. It remains the most popular and compelling genre for conveying themes and experiences that resonate with all Canadians. And by expressing universal themes in stories reflecting daily life from all regions of the country, drama has the further ability to strengthen bonds among Canada’s diverse peoples. (CCAU, 2002, p. 2)

Dramatic programs are indeed the manner in which Canadians tell and share their stories with one another. . . Dramatic series bring the continued, familiar and powerful storylines and characters that Canadians love to watch. Movies of the week and mini-series allow Canadian television viewers to explore a broad range of programming genres, ideas and concepts. (CCAU, 2003a, p. 2)

Not every activity of a broadcaster that operates in the public interest can be expected to be profitable. A requirement to support Canadian drama is of fundamental importance. (CCAU, 2003b, p. 8)

Canadian drama is critically important to the future of Canadian television. . . . The production of Canadian drama is central to our cultural sovereignty. (CCAU, 2005a, p. 4)

“The envelope please . . .”: Will the CCAU prevail?

For the unions engaging in the broadcasting policy network, the adoption of a coalition-based strategy has positively impacted their position within the broadcasting policy network, providing for increased opportunities to actively shape policy that affects the domestic English-language independent film and television production labour market. The unions draw on their respective strengths in contributing to the coalition framework, while gaining valuable support and legitimacy from the collective actions of their labour colleagues. This pooling of resources has positioned them as credible, informed, and proactive players on the broadcasting policy landscape. The unions clearly enter the policy network as rep-
resentatives of their members’ interests. As the definition of the public interest in Canadian broadcasting neatly coincides with the unions’ members’ interests, the unions also operate to challenge the prevailing policy paradigm that privileges corporate interests through invoking arguments based on social and cultural objectives of the public-service broadcasting model.

The issue of Canadian drama has been a chicken-and-egg scenario for years, revolving around the question “If you air it, will they watch?” The overall industry average for viewing of Canadian drama was 9.2% for private conventional broadcasters in 2003-04 (CRTC, 2005b). Speculations vary about why Canadians do not watch Canadian drama in greater numbers. Is it due to the lack of a star system in Canada? Is it lack of advertising and promotion? Smaller production budgets that result in lower production values? Lack of product availability? Inadequate research and development or pilot system? Do Canadians simply prefer to watch American drama?

These are not simple questions with simple solutions, although the CCAU’s campaign has directly engaged with the fundamental issues in an articulate, organized policy platform. The CCAU’s campaign to fix the “crisis in Canadian drama” has been a mix of successes and failures. Although the CCAU has not been successful in having drama expenditure and scheduling requirements reintroduced to the CRTC’s regulatory regime, the CRTC has announced details for a public hearing in November 2006 to review key elements of the 1999 Television Policy (CRTC, 2006b). In acknowledging the issues the CCAU raises, the Commission recognizes the decline in production of Canadian dramatic series since the implementation of the policy, but is also careful to note this has occurred in conjunction with “the collapse of the export markets and the rise in popularity of reality programming” (2006b, p. 14). The CRTC remains committed to a framework of “regulation only where the goals of the Act cannot be met by any other means,” with an emphasis on consumer choice, and there is no mention of revision of initiatives specific to dramatic programming per se (2006b, p. 22). Yet in addressing a key element of the CCAU’s policy platform, the CRTC has requested intervenors to comment specifically on the re-introduction of expenditure requirements for over-the-air broadcasters (2006b, p. 31). Perhaps the most significant victory for the CCAU is the political justification of Canadian dramatic programming as an integral component of the Canadian public-service broadcasting model requiring ongoing regulatory attention. The CCAU has also been tremendously successful in placing the issue not only on the CRTC’s agenda, but into the broader political sphere, as evidenced by the interventions of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage and former minister of Canadian Heritage Liza Frulla.

A great deal of research has yet to be undertaken linking organized labour in the Canadian cultural industries to the political processes that shape employment and working conditions. In developing a body of work specific to Canada, future research could include analyses of the relationship of the French-language film and television labour organizations to their specific markets and policy networks,
as well as the role of labour in the development, implementation, and evaluation of policy regarding other cultural industries and arts sectors. Analyses specific to the other layers of the state (municipal, provincial, continental, and international) are necessary to gain an accurate perspective of labour’s relationship to cultural policy in all its interconnected jurisdictions. Comparative analyses with arts and cultural industries and labour organizations in other countries that share similar regulatory frameworks or approaches to cultural policy would also be of value in mapping the role of labour in cultural policy networks. The research will become even more relevant as policy jurisdictions become increasingly intertwined, the value of arts and culture in social and industrial terms evolves, and as civil society organizations develop more sophisticated linkages in policy processes. Understanding where labour is situated in this landscape is crucial, for labour brings the voices of the artists and other creative workers to the policy table, voices that are seen as increasingly important from social, cultural, and economic perspectives.

Acknowledgment
I would like to thank Liora Salter, John Shields, Joyce Zemans, and the anonymous reviewers at the CJC for their helpful comments and constructive suggestions on earlier versions of this article. I also gratefully acknowledge the financial support of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

Notes
1. The most recent CRTC definition of dramatic programming includes the following: ongoing dramatic series; ongoing comedy series (sitcoms); specials, miniseries, and made-for-TV feature films; theatrical feature films aired on television; animated television programs and films (excludes computer graphic productions without storylines); programs of comedy sketches, improvisations, unscripted works, stand-up comedy; and other drama, including, but not limited to, readings, narratives, improvisations, tapes/films of live theatre not developed specifically for television, experimental shorts, video clips, continuous action animation (e.g., puppet shows) (CRTC, 1999b).
2. Some of the labour organizations in this study are technically classified as guilds rather than unions. In keeping with both industry and broadcasting policy vernacular, the groups referred to herein will collectively be referred to as unions or organized labour.
3. The film and television production process is composed of three phases. Development and pre-production includes script acquisitions and story development, hiring of key creative personnel, and production financing. Principal photography is when actual filming occurs, and post-production is the final stage where editing, digital effects, and sound design take place. Of the three stages, principal photography is the most labour intensive, and is generally the stage referred to in analyses of film and television production (Christopherson, 2005).
4. For example, Degrassi: The Next Generation signed collective agreements with ACTRA for cast, DGC for key creative and logistical personnel as per their jurisdictions, NABET 700-CEP for technicians, the WGC for writers, and IATSE 667 and 411 for camera technicians and production coordinators, honeywagon drivers, and craft service providers, respectively.
5. The points system is employed in two different areas of broadcasting. The Canadian Audio-Visual Certification Office uses the point system to determine the amount of tax credit allowed, and provisional CAVCO certification is required for funding from the Canadian Television Fund. The CRTC uses a similar point system for determining Canadian content that qualifies toward priority programming requirements set out by CRTC regulations. Under both systems, points are determined through the following number of positions that are filled by Canadians: director (2 points),
screenwriter (2), lead performer (1) second lead (1), director of photography (1), art director (1), music composer (1), picture editor (1) (CA VCO, 2005; CRTC, 2005a).

6. In dealing with the implications of the 1999 Television Policy, the coalition is specifically addressing the English market, and while the French members support the positions of the English organizations, only those organizations directly involved with English dramatic production contribute expertise and resources for the coalition’s activities in that regard. When the coalition engages with issues concerning the French-Canadian market, a reciprocal framework applies.

7. Related issues include parliamentary allocations for the Canadian Television Fund, the primary source of government funding required to put most domestic dramatic series into production.

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Decision 2001-457: Licence renewals for the television stations controlled by CTV. Ottawa, ON.

Broadcasting public notice 2003-54: Support for Canadian television drama—Call for comments. Ottawa, ON.

Broadcasting public notice 2004-32: Proposed incentives for English-language Canadian television drama—Call for comments. Ottawa, ON.


Broadcasting public notice 2005-81: Viewing and expenditure incentives for English-language Canadian television drama—Call for comments. Ottawa, ON.


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