

Oral Questions

CANADIAN ROLE IN CENTRAL AMERICA

Mr. Bob Ogle (Saskatoon East): During the debate yesterday it was brought up many times that we Canadians did not in a sense have any role or any expertise in that area. As a last question to the parliamentary secretary, will he now please tell the House how the government plans to have us acquire that expertise and that role in that area, just as we would if we had a sick neighbour down the street we did not know but would have to help?

[Translation]

Mr. Louis Duclos (Parliamentary Secretary to Secretary of State for External Affairs): Madam Speaker, in view of the wording of yesterday's motion, I had concluded that the New Democratic Party believed that it had this expertise and that it was well aware of the facts. As for the briefing notes, I must point out to the hon. member that not having any, I could not therefore have the wrong page.

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CANADIAN BROADCASTING CORPORATION

MEASURES TO SETTLE STRIKE

Mr. John Bosley (Don Valley West): Madam Speaker, I have a question for the Minister of Communications. In spite of his commitment several weeks ago to end the CBC journalists' strike, in spite of a major shift in the position of the union and in spite of several courageous efforts at mediation made by the Department of Labour, the CBC management's position has not changed and the newsmen are still on strike. Could the minister advise the House of the steps he intends to take to settle this strike, especially when one considers that the government is seeking our approval for a 12.4 per cent increase in the estimates of the CBC, while the CBC management will not budge an inch from its 8 per cent raise offer to its journalists, and when one considers also that the CBC management will refuse to make a final offer until the union agrees to recommend it to its membership without first looking into it.

Hon. Francis Fox (Secretary of State and Minister of Communications): Madam Speaker, the hon. member knows well the nature of the system under which the CBC operates. From time immemorial, the parties on both sides of the House have reaffirmed the basic concept that CBC should be free from all government interference and able to conduct its broadcasting business independently from the government as far as content and labour relations are concerned.

On the other hand, the hon. member is ill informed. Before asking such questions in the House, he should know that the CBC management's position has changed over the weeks and months. Although an agreement has not been reached, the fact remains that the money items include a lump sum offer of

\$2,300 to each of the 180 newsmen and that the special mediator appointed by the Minister of Labour has explored all possible avenues of settlement. For the time being, the union has turned down the salary offers, but the CBC management is willing to return to the bargaining table and to continue negotiating in the hope that a settlement will soon be reached.

● (1435)

Mr. Bosley: Madam Speaker, I should like to put a supplementary to the Secretary of State and Minister of Communications.

The minister knows full well that this strike, the longest in the history of Radio-Canada, is reducing coverage of the constitutional debate in Quebec, that the rest of Canada is less aware of the fact that Quebec is opposed to the constitutional proposals and that, should the strike continue, it will prevent practically any coverage at all of the provincial elections in a large part of the province.

Madam Speaker, will the government assume its responsibility for giving that service, because as Quebecers and francophones across the country become increasingly aware of Radio-Canada's persistent resistance to settling this strike they are led to believe that the government wants the strike to continue, and that, for political reasons?

Mr. Fox: Madam Speaker, this is the first time I have ever heard a spokesman of the opposition ask the government to intervene directly in the daily operations of Radio-Canada. If that is the new position of the Progressive Conservative Party, Madam Speaker, that is, to put an end to the principle which anglophones in this country have always known as the—

[English]

—"arm's length principle". I am astounded that hon. members of the opposition would ask this government to cast aside the arm's length principle which has always been one of the basic principles of this government in dealing with culturalism.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Madam Speaker: Order, please. I do not know what has happened to the House today, but I wish it were a little bit quieter. I recognize the Right Hon. Leader of the Opposition.

COVERAGE DURING ANTICIPATED PROVINCIAL ELECTION
CAMPAIGN

Right Hon. Joe Clark (Leader of the Opposition): Madam Speaker, there are very many of us who have long memories about the arm's length relationship with the CBC; we remember the words of the Prime Minister who was going to put on the lid and shut the doors of the CBC, and we remember the words of the minister, now the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs—

Some hon. Members: Question.