

CANADIAN BROADCASTING CORPORATION—DISPUTE
WITH NABET—REQUEST THAT CBC ENGAGE IN
MEANINGFUL NEGOTIATIONS

Mr. Mark Rose (Fraser Valley West): Mr. Speaker, I agree with the course of action that has been taken and am very pleased that the minister who is going to reply to my question is in the House. I hope that the interventions that occurred earlier will not subtract from the time that I have available to present my case. It deals with the NABET-CBC dispute. I fully realize that there is little political mileage to be gained by anyone, especially one who speaks on behalf of the complainants in a labour dispute these days. That is simply an acknowledgement on my part of the particular climate of Canadian public opinion as it applies to strikes.

I believe that the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) is convinced that his predecessor, Mr. Pearson, made a gross error in ever permitting strikes in the civil service at all, and the present government strategy, whether we are talking about the air traffic controllers, the airport technicians or the CBC technicians, is one of foot-dragging for the specific purpose of encouraging the build-up of a negative opinion with respect to strikes, to the extent that frustrated Canadians will rise up as a man and demand a system of compulsory arbitration in labour disputes in the public service. I am very pleased that the President of the Treasury Board (Mr. Drury) looked up at that point, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased if I reached him. It does not seem to matter whether the particular component of the public service affected by a dispute is essential or not in the public interest.

The NABET strike-lock-out routine with the CBC has gone on since January 22. These men and women, employees of the CBC, were pushed into the position they now occupy because ever since May, 1971, the CBC has refused to budge from its initial working conditions and wage offer. Someone has said, and his name escapes me even though I consulted the hon. member for Winnipeg North (Mr. Orlikow) on the source, that justice delayed is justice denied.

It is always easy to blame labour for the interruption of a popular broadcast such as NHL hockey, particularly if one does not take the time or trouble to identify where the blame really lies. Our affable Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce (Mr. Pepin) has a line that he often uses in this House, based on a popular song. He often says that it takes two to tango. But, Mr. Speaker, it also takes two sides to negotiate. When one side solidifies, then productive negotiations cease. I believe that has happened for the past ten months with the CBC and NABET, but recent calls by NABET for a summit meeting with the President of the CBC have produced some result. Apparently there is to be such a meeting tomorrow. I am extremely happy with this but I would like to know the basis for the inflexibility shown in this dispute. Why has it gone on so long before this summit meeting takes place?

Sometimes I wonder if it is the death wish of the CBC. I also wonder, and I hope I will be excused for my suspicion, if there is some kind of link between the Liberal government and the treasury board that seems to motivate or occasion deliberate and identical tactics which the

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treasury board introduces no matter what the particular bargaining component concerned happens to be.

All of us have observed, and I regret this personal inference, that Mr. Davidson, the president of the CBC has rather large ears. There is a strong, positive correlation between large ears and acoustical sensitivity. I point out that Mr. Davidson is a career civil servant and he does not like noise. I believe that the reason he is president of the CBC today is to keep things quiet. After people such as his predecessors met with trouble and controversy with programs such as "This Hour has Seven Days" the government was on the lookout for someone to clamp the lid down for at least a few years. I think the president of the CBC has done this with considerable success.

But what I am concerned about is the outright neglect and waste not only of the taxpayer's interest but also of his money. It has been estimated that the NABET strike has cost Canadian taxpayers between \$5 million and \$10 million to date from the time it started. I do not know; it depends on how one looks at it. I do not have with me the accounts of the President of the Treasury Board and I do not have his ability to figure. But I believe it would be much more simple and far less costly in terms of morale and finance if there had been a settlement a long time ago, because the ultimate figure probably will not be much more than \$6 million, \$8 million or \$9 million. I do not think that was the strategy. I think public opinion was built up behind a particular strategy so that the government could call for a board of arbitration in respect of this dispute. I believe there would be a good deal of support for this. I am sorry to say so, but I believe this is the situation.

So the government's strategy is working. I regret it, but I think that is the case. The CBC is supposed to be an independent Crown corporation. I do not believe it is independent of government influence. I do not understand how anyone could listen, for instance, to Ron Collier interviewing the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) and still believe the CBC is an independent Crown corporation.

I think the sinister implication of a prolonged strike, however disparate the position taken by the French director Raymond David, will ultimately occasion the death of the CBC as we have come to know it and to depend on it in its role as a public broadcaster in Canada.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Boulanger): Order. The time of the hon. member has expired.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Gérard Pelletier (Secretary of State): Mr. Speaker, the form of the hon. member's question somewhat surprises me. First of all, I don't see any connection with the principle of the CBC employees' right to strike, which has never been questioned. I believe there must be some confusion in the mind of the hon. member when he glibly speaks of the "lock-out" which the CBC is alleged to be perpetrating since January, without the slightest reference to the rotating strike which the union is not making any secret about, I believe, and which has been carried out quite openly.

I also fail to understand how he can, in the same breath, mention the interference of the Treasury Board in a