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## Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage

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**Tuesday, September 27, 2005**

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**Chair**

**Ms. Marlene Catterall**

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## Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage

Tuesday, September 27, 2005

•(0905)

[English]

**The Chair (Ms. Marlene Catterall (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.)):** I call to order this meeting of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage. I remind everybody that unfortunately we have very little time this morning. We are to be in our seats at 9:45 for the installation of the new Governor General.

Let me just run down the agenda and see what we most urgently want to deal with. We have two motions concerning the CBC, one from Mr. Angus and one from Ms. Oda. We also have another one from Mr. Angus on the CRTC decision on satellite radio and the ultimate cabinet disposition of an appeal of that decision. We have two nominations for appointments that have been referred to the committee, one for Guy Fournier as chair of the board of directors of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, and the other is for the chairperson of the trustees of the National Gallery of Canada. I suspect the one with respect to CBC is the most interesting.

[Translation]

We also have two private members' bills, one sponsored by Ms. Oda, and one by Mr. Mark, who is not here,

[English]

on the Ukrainian Canadian Restitution Act, and Chinese Canadian Recognition and Redress Act. We are to report to Parliament on Mr. Mark's bill by October 7 and on Ms. Oda's bill by October 28. I don't know if you want to get into a discussion of that this morning.

I'd like to hear from the committee what we first want to deal with, and perhaps it's the CBC resolutions. But if we're not going to report by October 7—and I understand the mover of that motion is satisfied that things are progressing, that something satisfactory is being implemented—we would have to request an extension from the House on our report. I don't know if you want to deal with that first or leave that until our Thursday meeting.

What's the will of the committee? Can I suggest a debate on the two motions on the CBC lockout and having Mr. Rabinovitch appear in front of the committee on that? Mr. Angus, yours is first on the agenda. Do you want to speak to your motion?

**Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I feel it's very important at the heritage committee that we are seen as taking this issue as seriously as I think it is at this stage. We're now seven weeks into the lockout. A major debate has begun in the media, not just about the direction of the CBC, but about whether we

even need a CBC. I think the lockout has brought into focus the need for us as legislators to make a public commitment to our public broadcaster and to talk about the direction it's going in.

My desire to get Mr. Rabinovitch before the committee is focused on the fact that we need to know exactly what is going on in terms of the grand master plan. We are seeing the fall season beginning on other stations. I believe right now we're gambling with our audience base at CBC—something we can't afford to do. I'm not interested in debating the minutiae between the Media Guild's position on certain jobs here and Rabinovitch's position on other jobs there. I don't feel that's our role as legislators. I don't want to engage in that. But I do believe it's our role as a heritage committee, because of the parliamentary appropriations that have been forwarded for programming, that we ask Mr. Rabinovitch here ASAP, to send a message that we think it's very important that we engage in this debate, that we get some clarity on where CBC is going. I think we also have to send a message that taxpayers' money has been set aside for CBC and programming is not being delivered.

I believe there's an accountability factor there that goes outside the normal issues in terms of a labour dispute. As I said, I'm not interested in engaging in either the guild or management's side on that. I want to look at where we're going in terms of the big picture of CBC, and we need to hear from the chairman.

•(0910)

**The Chair:** Ms. Bulte and then Ms. Oda.

**Hon. Sarmite Bulte (Parkdale—High Park, Lib.):** Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Let me preface my remarks by saying that I think the strike has gone on way too long. However, the parties are at the negotiating table. The Minister of Labour has called them in. My understanding is they are negotiating and they're very close to reaching a settlement. There are a few issues that are still left to be resolved.

I believe in the collective bargaining process, and we have to let it try to figure its way out. To bring Mr. Rabinovitch or to bring the Canadian Media Guild or Mr. Stursberg or Ms. Chalmers or Mr. Smith before us at this time is not appropriate. If anything, it will limit the amount of discovery we can have of these witnesses at this time. We need to ask questions, yes. We need to take it upon ourselves to look at what has happened to our CBC, what we need to do to make it better, and what is at stake here. It's not just the unions and management; it's all Canadians. For us, at this time, to in any way prejudice or potentially prejudice any type of settlement, I would strongly urge against it.

The moment the strike is over I would even say that if necessary we hold a series of hearings, not just one, to examine all facets of the CBC and ask for accountability. What is happening to that money? What is going to happen?

To bring him now, I oppose that very much. It will prejudice negotiations. I want to see the CBC back on the air and then let's discuss it, but the priority right now is to get those two parties to finish negotiating.

**The Chair:** Ms. Oda, then Mr. Kotto, Mr. Boudria, Mr. Angus.

If people get upset with me if I'm not doing the normal distribution of speakers, I'm sort of taking people as they raise their hands at the moment.

Ms. Oda, please.

**Ms. Bev Oda (Durham, CPC):** Madam Chair, I think it's very important that we very clearly articulate that everyone certainly is concerned about the situation as it stands right now. It's important that the CBC, as a service to Canadians, be given the support that it requires. I do understand and have concerns similar to those of Mr. Angus regarding the situation as it is.

As far as a grand plan is concerned, historically there have been a number of reviews of the mandate of the CBC. This is something that I think should be done, but it is a long process. There is a very intense debate that surrounds any discussion on the grand mandate of the CBC. I think one is warranted regarding the new environment in which the CBC, as a public broadcaster, has to operate; however, I think that is overarching and not something that necessarily can be done in one or two sessions of this committee. I would see that we, as a committee, look to see how we could address that somewhere along the line.

Of immediate concern, however, is to recognize that, and that the ideal resolution to this is the negotiated resolution. I am encouraged that the parties are at the table, and it is my hope that resolution can be found as quickly as possible.

My concern, however, to bring them before the committee and to not in any way interfere in that process is a difficult and challenging one. I think what we have to make sure we do accomplish as a committee of Parliament, without interfering in the negotiating process, is to get a report on the impact this lockout has had on the service. And it is not just the salaries, etc.; I think there is impact. I certainly don't have a clear picture on the impact of the advertising support, which has maybe changed. Certainly the utilization of programming by the service has been altered from their original plans last spring, etc. So there are many aspects to the impact.

And to hear how they would see their plans for the remainder of this broadcast year—this is different from asking about a grand plan. One broadcast year is only one broadcast year; however, there is a bigger review that should be done of what is the mandate in today's world.

Primarily I would like to also say that I think accountability on the utilization of the public funds.... I see that we have opportunity to do that not only by calling the CBC but also through pre-budget consultations, because it is something that happens. I know they must report to the Treasury Board on the public funds, etc.. So we

have other stages at which we can always have the CBC account for the utilization of public funds.

My recommendation and my motion, as you can see, is asking for full representation, so that we do get complete answers as we ask our questions. However, my serious concern is the timing at which they would be appearing before us, and to avoid any...not even actual, but even perceived interference in the negotiations, which I hope to see coming to a completion as soon as possible.

• (0915)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Kotto.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Maka Kotto (Saint-Lambert, BQ):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I totally agree with Mr. Angus' request. It's not a question of interfering in or altering the bargaining process, but of understanding the scene that is playing out under our very eyes. The public interest is at stake. Our constituents have a right to know what is happening. We're getting many inquiries. Even in Quebec, where the English network is primarily affected, questions are being asked. People are beginning to speculate that the problem could also spread shortly to the French-language network in Quebec.

I want to know where all of this is going. I want to give my constituents, the people I'm supposed to represent, a status report. We have a duty to be open with the public.

I would also remind you that if we imply that we're hiding something or protecting someone, then the chasm between politicians and the people could grow wider. In my view, greater transparency would shore up the image of politicians which has taken a beating in public opinion polls. We can intervene without changing anything. Perhaps we could simply limit our actions to raising questions that are unrelated to the negotiations, as we thought of doing in conjunction with the World Film Festival. In any event, we're entitled to know the score.

• (0920)

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Mr. Boudria.

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Don Boudria (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

As you know, I'm not a member of this committee. This morning, I heard that this matter was going to be discussed and I literally made a beeline for the committee. Francophones outside Quebec face a unique problem. The problem may not be quite as acute in my region, in that people are able to listen to a French-language radio station. While it may not be quite the same, they can tune in to another French-language station. But when the CBC is broadcasting over the Ottawa airwaves reports about a traffic jam on Highway 40, this has nothing to do with local news. No one can convince me that the CBC is fulfilling its mandate with broadcasts of this nature. That's not the case. Imagine I how would feel listening to a report about a traffic jam on Highway 40 if I lived in Saskatoon! This news is of no interest to Saskatoon residents. It's not regional news.

Right now, the only French-language station that we can get is Radio-Montréal, not Radio-Canada. That's fine if you live in Montreal, but it makes no sense if you live in Ottawa, Saskatoon, Regina or in other regions. Imagine the implications for residents of Northern communities. Broadcasts are virtually of no interest or use to them. I've come to the conclusion that outside the greater Montreal area, or fundamentally, outside Quebec, the current lockout is only beneficial to Anglophones who want to brush up on their French by listening to the radio. Aside from that, the lockout makes no sense and serves no useful purpose.

That's what I've been doing. I've been listening to Spanish radio and learning Spanish as a third language. I'll listen to anything, provided it's in Spanish. It's good practice for me, nothing more.

Similarly, this situation does not help minorities at all. We need to talk about it. It's just about the same on television. I think people have a greater tendency to turn on the radio rather than the television for their local news.

I'm mindful of the comments of the parliamentary secretary and the official opposition critic. I'm wondering if there might not be some way of combining the two principles. Above all, I wouldn't want the committee to do anything that might prolong the labour dispute. Tomorrow morning, I'd like to tune in to Brigitte Bureau on Radio-Canada. I'm tired of hearing about traffic tie-ups on Highway 40. I wouldn't want our actions to compound the problem.

[English]

I'm just wondering whether the following would be a good idea. I've listened to and I've read the motion of our colleague, Mr. Angus. If we were to add after the word "lockout", by way of an amendment, "including the impact on minority language and isolated communities", and add after that "and that such a meeting be held at the first meeting following the end of the lockout"....

In other words, we would say today that we want them to be accountable but, at the same time, not to jeopardize the negotiations. We would be on record now as saying they have to come here the day after it's finished. The public record will be clear, but at the same time, there would be no danger that we would cause more harm than good, notwithstanding the best intentions that I know all our colleagues have.

I think maybe that would be a good way of looking at it, Madam Chair.

**The Chair:** I just want to point out that it's conceivable that the lockout could end without the negotiations having been concluded.

Is that an amendment you're moving, Mr. Boudria?

**Hon. Don Boudria:** Yes, Madam Chair, if I may, I could move that, which I will repeat to give the text of it: by adding, after the word "lockout", "including the impact on minority language and isolated communities". I think that part is rather friendly, if I can call it that. Then the rest of the words would be "and that such a meeting be held at the first meeting following the end of the lockout". I don't want to say "ratification vote". What if it ends without a ratification vote? But if they are not locked out, I think it's fair game at that point. If the committee decides otherwise—

• (0925)

**The Chair:** Can I just point out that we have perhaps six minutes. I think we've probably had enough discussion. I know Mr. Angus and Mr. Rota wanted to speak. I wonder if we could give Mr. Rota a couple of minutes, Ms. Oda, and then you could wrap up. Then we'll deal with the motion, Mr. Angus, if that's acceptable.

Briefly, please.

**Mr. Anthony Rota (Nipissing—Timiskaming, Lib.):** I'll be very brief. I think Mr. Boudria covered everything very well.

My concern was this. We talked about accountability, and that usually refers to finances. When we're talking about heritage, we're talking about covering Canada. Like Mr. Angus, I'm from northern Ontario. To us, CBC is very important. I'd be out of line if I weren't speaking for my constituents. It's very important that we stress how important it is to keep coverage. When we bring them in, we would like to see what their plan is in the long term as far as coverage of remote areas is concerned, some areas that are not covered. It is the voice not only of rural Canada but of Canadians who may not be in downtown Toronto or metropolitan areas. I would like to see it extended to that. It is very important to see what the mandate is and see what the long-term outlook is.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** I have Ms. Oda next on my list. Ms. Oda, do you wish to take your minute?

**Ms. Bev Oda:** My concern with Mr. Boudria's amendment is this. As you point out, it may not have been settled; however, the lockout may have ceased, and consequently I would still be concerned about interfering in any kind of negotiations that would continue on. I also want to make sure not only that we call Mr. Rabinovitch, but that we have all the people necessary so that we aren't lacking any information.

As for the reasonableness of the first meeting after, my experience would say that the next meeting could be within 24 hours of any settlement, and consequently, to make effective use of our meeting with the CBC at that time, I don't want the response to every question to be "Well, we only settled yesterday and consequently we don't have a full picture and consequently we can't...". I don't mean to extend the period of time before which they come, but I think there is reasonableness and making sure we make effective use of the time with the CBC.

**The Chair:** Mr. Boudria, given those comments, do you want to consider withdrawing your amendment? Your words are on the record, and I know that's very—

**Hon. Don Boudria:** I guess I can do that. If I may, a large number of people are obviously not going to support it. Maybe I could withdraw the last part and still keep the part about the minority language and remote communities, though, because what this is doing is just terrible. Francophones outside Quebec don't have radio right now, and they have very little TV that's usable.

**The Chair:** Mr. Angus.

**Mr. Charlie Angus:** I should speak to it, since I'm going to wrap up, and I would amend it.

Just for the record, I think this has to be stated clearly. Madam Bulte spoke numerous times about a strike. It's not a strike; it's a lockout. I believe that's what we're here to discuss. The decision to withdraw services from the public of Canada is what I'm interested in.

Anybody who thinks that us talking about the big vision of the CBC will interfere with negotiations—that's a red herring. I believe that if CBC management come to us the day after the lockout and they can't provide answers as to why they decided to withdraw services from the public, if they can't explain what their strategy was in place for what they were going to face in terms of possibly losing audience base, if they can't say what they figured the financial costs would be from the lockout or the financial benefits that they were anticipating by denying wages, then I think we have a real credibility problem with the CBC.

I believe that we need to have them here as soon as possible to discuss the fact that service was cut off to people across Canada. Representing a rural riding, like Mr. Rota and Mr. Boudria, I know it has had a major impact. The English people in my riding have heard Rod Stewart, muzak. The French constituents are hearing about the pileups on Pie IX Boulevard. It's a mockery of what we have a national broadcaster for.

This is an issue of the decision by CBC management to cut off service. That's what I'm interested in. If we have to, in order to get consensus, wait till the first meeting after the lockout is ended, I'm willing to accept that. But I don't believe it has anything to do with the negotiations. It has to do with the management decision to pull the plug on our nation's broadcasts.

● (0930)

**The Chair:** If we're going to deal with this—

**Hon. Sarmite Bulte:** Can we call the vote? Otherwise let's defer it, because we have to be in our seats by 9:45.

**The Chair:** Mr. Boudria, would you read into the record what amendment you would like us to vote on?

**Ms. Bev Oda:** Madam Chair, could I ask Mr. Boudria to consider adding the amendment to my motion, as my motion reflects a fuller request of the CBC?

**The Chair:** We have about two minutes here, guys.

**Hon. Sarmite Bulte:** Let's just vote on Mr. Angus' motion.

**Mr. Charlie Angus:** Why don't we vote on it, and I'll accept the amendment from Mr. Boudria if he wants to retain it.

**Hon. Don Boudria:** Madam Chair, I think I'll retain the whole thing of my amendment.

**The Chair:** Can you just read it into the record then, before we vote on it?

**Hon. Don Boudria:** If one word needs to be changed—

**The Chair:** I don't think it needs to be written. I think it just needs to be read into the record.

**Hon. Don Boudria:** It will be read.

I would amend the motion by Mr. Angus by adding the following words: "including the impact on minority language and isolated communities, and that such a meeting be held at the next meeting following the end of the lockout." I'll leave it at that. It doesn't matter how they get back to work. I think if they're back to work it's fair game. It won't interfere; they'll be back to work.

**The Chair:** On the amendment, those in favour.

**Hon. Sarmite Bulte:** Wait just a second. Again, Madam Chair, we're rushing this. This deserves more attention than to have this thing rushed through right now. I have a problem with just calling Mr. Rabinovitch before. It's not just Mr. Rabinovitch. It's got to be Ms. Chalmers, it's got to be Mr. Hill, and it's got to be Mr. Stursberg. Let's just back up the train here.

Everybody agrees, Mr. Angus, that this has gone on way too long. You'll pardon me that I didn't use the correct language. I know it's a lockout.

**Mr. Charlie Angus:** You just asked for a vote five minutes ago.

**Hon. Sarmite Bulte:** I beg your pardon.

**Mr. Charlie Angus:** You just asked us to vote on this five minutes ago.

**Hon. Sarmite Bulte:** We just talked about the amendment that's come here. There's a new amendment that's been read in. I'm not going to jump just because it's convenient or we're running out of time.

Again I ask, Madam Chair, that you consider that we either defer this to the next meeting so we can talk about it, or we vote, whatever the committee wishes. But I will be voting against the motion.

**Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.):** I would like to speak to the issue as well. So I would ask for a deferral.

**The Chair:** Is that a motion to defer it to our meeting on Thursday at 11 a.m.?

● (0935)

**Mr. Mario Silva:** Yes.

**The Chair:** I think that takes precedence. Does it not, Mr. Clerk?

**Mr. Jacques Lahaie (Clerk of the Committee, Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage):** Yes.

**An hon. member:** It's debatable, isn't it?

**The Chair:** Whether it is or it is not, I think we don't have time for debate.

All those in favour of the motion to defer to our Thursday morning meeting. Opposed? Five in favour and five opposed. That means I have to...

I'm following the lead of the Speaker of the House of Commons. I vote for the debate to continue, for deferral. Thank you.

The meeting is adjourned.







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