



## American Federation of Television and Radio Artists

### Office of the National President

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September 13, 2005

To: Ambassador of the Government of Canada

Re: Lockout of Union Workforce Employed by Canadian Broadcasting Corporation

Your Excellency,

On behalf of the 70,000 journalists, media staff, musical artists, and actors of The American Federation of Television and Radio Artists (AFTRA, AFL-CIO), I wish to register our strong concern over the actions of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, which has locked out its 5,500 employees – our colleagues -- who are members of the Canadian Media Guild.

It is now four weeks since the CBC management took this unprecedented and unprovoked action, and it raises serious questions about the commitment of Canada's public broadcasting network to international labor standards and to the maintenance of basic employment rights within the public sector.

It is particularly troubling that CBC management took their disastrous course of action at the very moment when the superb skills of its employees were most needed by the people of Canada and the world. The fact that one of the world's premiere news organizations was prevented from covering the biggest story of the decade – Hurricane Katrina, its aftermath, and the US government's ignominious collapse in the face of the crisis -- is not only shameful, it is irresponsible on the part of CBC management.

This dispute, over renewal of a collective agreement that defines the employment conditions of the largest single body of creators and media employees in Canada, has both shaken public confidence in the CBC and damaged the network's international reputation.

When one of the world's leading public broadcasters tries to impose a regime of work so contrary to Canada's long-standing record of social protection and quality employment, it threatens not only the quality of content and standards in journalism and broadcast production generally, it also raises fears about the very future of public media.

The Canadian Media Guild is willing to negotiate a new contract that takes account of the changing nature of the broadcast industry, and which will also equip the CBC for the challenges of the future. But the Guild has, rightly, refused to accept that decent working conditions and employment rights should be diminished in the process.

Any objective observer will concede that CMG's current contract and institutional behaviour provide CBC with all the flexibility it needs to continue to produce its extraordinarily high level of

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news and information programming in an admittedly changing media world.

Far from looking to negotiate a fair settlement in the interests of all, the management of CBC has chosen the path of confrontation and has tried to intimidate the workforce. We cannot accept that locking out workers is a credible industrial relations strategy that should be used by an agency of any democratic country.

It is galling for me to read the articles by CBC management attempting to justify their lonely stance. It is wearying to survey their increasingly old and tired litany of neo-liberal nostrums -- canned lectures on competitiveness, on flexibility, on global economics. It is wearying because these empty assertions have all turned out to bear false promise of a better world for human beings. In the under-developed world this line has provided rationalization for continued oppression of working people and a degraded environment. In the "advanced" countries, it has proved a nasty, cynical recipe for the steady wrecking of the middle-class, and a descent into penury for workers.

Indeed CBC management falls prey to unconscious irony in its use of the neo-liberal language of the US-inspired NAFTA to state its position, so hard upon the heels of the US brushing aside the NAFTA tribunal's ruling on Canadian softwood.

Journalists and media staff across the world are today protesting in solidarity with their Canadian colleagues. We do so because we want to express our support for the staunch resistance of trade unionists at the CBC, who refused to be bullied by a management that appears to have lost its way and is determined upon confrontation.

AFTRA has informed our member journalists that they ought not contribute reportage to CBC while the lockout continues. We have further informed our members in the Recording Industry and Entertainment that they ought not provide interviews to CBC until the lockout ends. We will be discussing additional forms of solidarity.

We share common concerns with our Canadian colleagues. Everywhere we see that people who yearn for quality information services struggle to maintain public service values in broadcasting. In many countries broadcast staff and public interest groups struggle to defend public service media.

Public broadcasting, based on respect for national social, democratic and cultural values, is under tremendous ongoing pressure from a strident private sector lobby, which wants to eliminate all forms of public funding for broadcasting in favour of commercially-driven media. We know that if they succeed, this will ultimately lead to populist and low-quality programming that prioritizes the interests of advertisers and commerce.

The CBC's strategy and actions play into the hands of those who wish to do harm to the future of public service media. This dispute is, we believe, an example of where a management under pressure to compete in a difficult market environment, has committed the cardinal error of stepping back from the core principles upon which the Corporation was founded.

It is not far-fetched to imagine that the reckless course of action undertaken by CBC management may well wound CBC so to the quick that it may never recover. This is alarming reason enough for the Canadian Government to act with dispatch to knock some sense into

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management's head.

For years my family and I have relied upon the in-depth reporting and clear-eyed perspective of CBC news international broadcasts to help balance the ravings of cable news and the headlines-only tendencies in commercial broadcasts. So I write not only as a trade unionist but as CBC audience as well.

Just last month I had the privilege and honor to work side-by-side with a superb cadre` of Canadian artists and craft workers on the production of a feature film in Winnipeg. While working in Manitoba I had the opportunity to meet a large number of CBC journalists and workers as the lockout began.

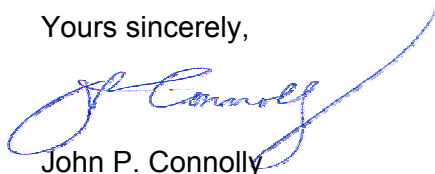
I witnessed first hand the tremendous insight, intelligence and searing dedication to their work -- and to the CBC -- of the dozens of French and English language CBC radio and television employees I met at meetings and on the picket lines.

I witnessed first hand the damage to the core fabric of trust and community essential to the success of the enterprise being wrought by management's foolish tactic of the lockout.

We urge the Canadian Government to insist that CBC management end the lockout, and revisit their position on contract workers. We call upon your Government to ensure a swift and just conclusion to this dispute that puts the interests of Canadians, along with fair and decent conditions of employment, at the heart of the resolution. We call on you to renew Canada's commitment to the highest standards of public service broadcasting and to encourage a genuine social dialogue between the management and union at CBC.

Standing alongside our colleagues at the CBC, and with media trades unionists from other countries who have joined the protest today organized by the International Federation of Journalists, we ask you to urge Prime Minister Martin to act now to restore the good name and reputation of public broadcasting in Canada.

Yours sincerely,



John P. Connolly  
National President

cc: Hon. Paul Martin, Prime Minister  
International Federation of Journalists  
Canadian Media Guild  
ACTRA  
President John Sweeney, AFL-CIO