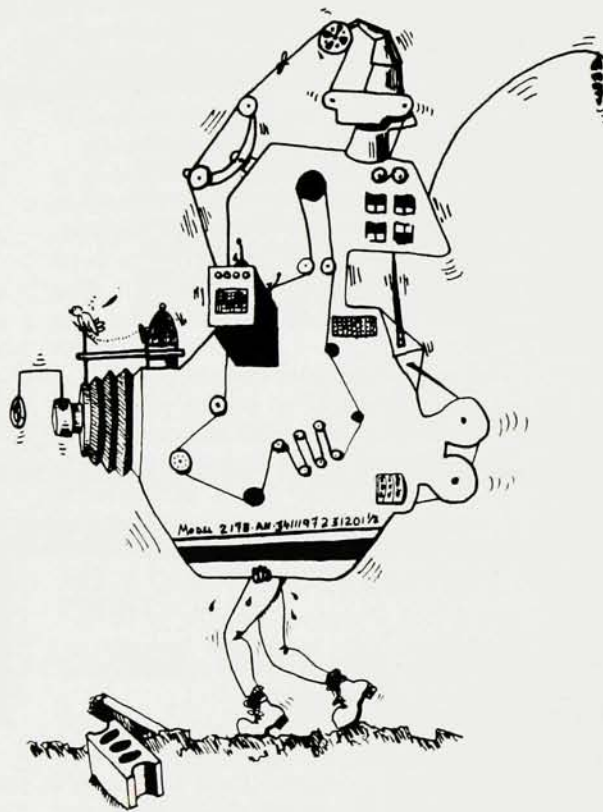


# CBC \ NABET \ CBC \ NABET \ CBC \ NABET

By Phil McPhedran



Drawing credits: Jason Whyte

*"I sympathize with the public and we have said time and time again in the press media that our battle is not with the public. Our battle is with the CBC."*

—A NABET spokesman—

*"Yes, there was a fairly prolonged reaction to hockey by the public until it went to the other network."*

—A CBC spokesman—

The strangest, and probably most unfortunate aspect, of the current strike/lock-out between the National Association of Broadcast Employees and Technicians and the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, is both sides' flagrant disregard for

the effect the dispute is having on the public and other areas of the entertainment field.

Neither side, despite protestations to the contrary, have shown much sincere interest in the welfare of the viewing and taxpaying public.

It is rather ironic that not only is the public being deprived of programming but that it is also suffering the indignity of having to pay for this privilege.

However, the public seems to have passively accepted this loss of programs and money without a murmur.

The main disruption has been on the radio and the production of new programs. It is on here where the most noticeable effect of the strike has been. Normal programming has come to a halt with 'disc spinning' as a replacement.

On television, aside from the hockey situation, the disruption has not been as obvious because the supervisory staff and reruns have covered for the absence of the technicians.

Relatively low key media coverage has also contributed to the acceptance of the dispute without any squawks. Except for a few isolated incidents in the hockey

games, the public has shown absolutely no interest whatsoever in the strike, let alone its cost.

The actual cost to the public would be very hard to express in dollars and cents. The CBC will likely bury the cost deep within its next annual report, anyway.

The effect the strike has had (and will have) on the other people in the entertainment field is just as hard to assess. The longer the strike continues, the harder hit are individuals within such groups as the Directors Guild and the Association of Canadian Television and Radio Artists (ACTRA).

Evelyn McCartney, Executive Secretary of the Directors Guild, says that the strike has affected the members "to the extent that some directors who had been contracted to do shows for the CBC have not yet had their contracts fulfilled." She feels about a dozen directors have been seriously affected.

The situation is worse at ACTRA. Paul Siren, their General Secretary says, "It is very obvious with the cancellation of programming that our members have been very severely affected".

Considering the rather precarious position of most actors and writers in the business, this 'lull' could have a quite devastating impression upon the members of ACTRA.

Cecil Smith of CBC's Public Relations asserts that "The CBC has taken the view to honour the contracts of ACTRA and other contracted parties to the Corporation".

Smith didn't seem too concerned with what happened to these 'contracted parties' in the meantime.

He did react to estimates from union officials concerning the amount of money the strike is costing the CBC. Smith said, "Yes, the strike has cost the Corporation money through radio, television, talent and programming, but nowhere near the ludicrous figures quoted by the union".

One Toronto union official estimated that the CBC has lost roughly \$10 million so far, and thinks it will cost them 'a whole lot more' before the dispute is over.

So both sides agree the strike is costing money, but again neither seem especially concerned with who will be footing the bill once a settlement is reached.

Another area where the cost is not measured in dollars, is the effect on morale and trust between the technicians and management, even after the technicians return to work.

So much bitterness has been stirred up by this dispute that the wounds will take quite a while to heal.

Ed Macpherson, secretary of local 74 explains it this way, "Even when the technicians do go back to work, whether it's because the guarantees have been dropped or we reach a compromise, or in fact get a new contract, the CBC will never be the same. Any personal relationships that had been developed over the years between the technicians and the supervisors has been completely destroyed, and it's rather unfortunate because in our type of industry you need co-operation. I don't think it can be restored overnight. It will take five years or more".

The CBC management seems to take the attitude that once the strike is settled everything will revert back to normal in a very short while.

Smith believes "Once a union has been out as long as NABET has, there is bound to be some rancour, however, once settlement has been achieved, the atmosphere will be much more relaxed".

A member of the Toronto executive said, "Our fight with the Corporation is really one all unions have, so in a sense, we're fighting for all the unions. The CBC knows if they break NABET, all the unions within the Corporation are broken."

The CBC is very emphatic in its denial of this accusation. "We're not trying to break the union," says Smith, "just because we haven't given in, doesn't mean we're out to destroy NABET."

He cites the fact that "the CBC's experience with other unions in the Corporation showed that mediation does work and we are confident that this dispute can be settled the same way."

Well, that may be so but it seems to be taking quite a while to settle this dispute.

Derek Nelson, Manager of Industrial Relations for the CBC when asked whether a settlement was any closer gave a "qualified yes" answer.

Union officials are not as optimistic. The Toronto executive feels the strike might

even extend into the fall. They feel Nelson's qualified yes must have been referring to the fact that the format for the talks had been decided upon.

Neither side is enthusiastic about the dispute going to arbitration.

Nelson said that practical rules with arbitration "is that there are no rules. We would only favour arbitration after all legal steps have been exhausted."

It is apparent that neither side wants to go to arbitration for the simple reason that both feel they have much to lose.

## COMMUNICATION GAP

Two examples illustrate how far apart the CBC and NABET are in trying to resolve their differences.

In June of last year, the CBC recommended to NABET that they forgo the conciliation officer and board stages and go straight into the mediation stage.

NABET rejected the proposal outright. Their reason: they didn't consider the summer a good time to strike (probably because that would be the time when the effects of the strike would be least noticeable).

The CBC believes, and quite rightly so, that the strike could have been settled now if the union had agreed to skip the conciliation stages. It would have at least advanced the talks six months.

The second example shows how the CBC has exaggerated their side of the story in one aspect of the bargaining.

The CBC says one of the major stumbling blocks to the settlement has been the high number of demands that the union has submitted.

The CBC suggests that NABET presented approximately 400 demands to them in May of last year, and that they had been pared down to about 230 by February of this year.

However, the CBC has a strange way of totalling up the proposals. NABET officials say they only presented roughly 110 original propo-

sals last year, and that that number has been reduced to below 85 now.

Why the discrepancy in figures? For just one proposal from the union, such as the reduction from an eight hour to a seven hour work day, the CBC considered that everywhere in the contract where this necessitates a change counts as a proposal. In other words, for example, if the wording in the contract has to be changed in 20 places then they equal 20 proposals.

The funny thing is that neither of these two examples are concrete issues between the sides, yet so much importance was placed upon the handling of each.

At the core of the dispute is the CBC's desire to take advantage of the advanced technology taking place in broadcasting while NABET is concerned with the effect the machinery will have upon their job jurisdiction and job security.

The CBC feels the union has to accept the fact that it is the right of the Corporation to make full use of any advances.

The technicians don't dispute the CBC's right to use new advances, all they are asking for is some say in the manner these changes are to be instituted.

The union also wants some guarantees of job security which is being threatened by the machines. It feels when automation comes, the equipment should be operated and maintained by technicians.

The Corporation concedes that all maintenance and handling of the equipment should be the responsibility of the technicians.

But the CBC says that technicians should only be assigned to certain jobs when non-technician personnel can't do the job.

For example, with the new tape recorders which can be carried in the interviewer's hand, the CBC sees no reason why a technician should be along to push one button.

What the CBC is trying to do is free its hands to make full use of all advances. It wants a relaxation of the present contract agreement that NABET members alone can set up, install, operate and maintain equipment.

As the technicians are the ones to be affected by any technological change, their argument that they should have some say in how the changes are instituted, is very fair.

On the surface, it sounds as if this dispute could be solved by some hard bargaining and a little compromise from both sides. It probably could, except for some underlying resentment from either side which has caused the current dispute to become a festering wound.

The technicians are openly critical of the underhanded tricks being played on them by what they call 'the shadow establishment'.

One executive in the Toronto local gave just one example. The CBC was going to cover a scientific conference in the United States with a full crew including technicians.

The CBC then told the technicians involved that they were cancelling the full crew for some reason, and were just sending a commentator down to cover the conference.

What happened was that a New York crew was hired to do the job for which the union rightfully believed belonged to it. The technicians think this was a deliberate attempt to undermine the union by the shadow establishment.

The technicians don't hold the higher members of the establishment in such high esteem either.

Although George Davidson instituted a new 'streamlined' approach within the Corporation in an attempt to simplify the structure, the technicians don't think he's done a very good job.

"The problem with Davidson", said one member of the Toronto local executive, "is that he doesn't hear what is going on or else he wouldn't be telling the press what fun being President of the Corporation is".

The Toronto executive of NABET cite the attitudes of Davidson, Nelson and Gene Hallman (Head of the English Services Division) as major factors in the distrust that has been generated between management and labour.

They resent that publicly all three are expressing 'deep concern' about settling the strike, yet privately, they are not doing anything constructive to reach any kind of settlement.

For its part, the CBC management has seen how NABET has become the most powerful union within the Corporation, and although it would never directly admit to trying to destroy the union, would obviously like to see some of its power curtailed.

This lends some credence to the manner in which the CBC has handled the NABET dispute thus far. It realizes that the other three unions within the Corporation are watching to see what the outcome will be in this struggle.

If the CBC backs down on any of the major issues, problems might arise with the other unions next time their contracts come up for renewal.

The management accusation against the union of 'featherbedding' is just a case of pot calling kettle black. The CBC has more bodies in its offices doing nothing than the entire membership of NABET.

A major reason why talks have not been productive yet is the docile acceptance of the disruption and cost by the general public.

Both sides, especially the CBC would be moving towards a quicker settlement if the public started complaining vocally.

If the public doesn't complain, then it will have no grounds to object as the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation's budget rises above last year's \$218,139,300.

(George Davidson, by the way, has gone onto bigger and better things at the United Nations. L. A. Picard, formerly Executive Vice-President, has been appointed successor to Davidson.)