

Government Orders

Is it that the government would be encouraging CBC to review and look at the viability of broadcasting in aboriginal languages, even in areas where there are many unilingual individuals who depend on that service in their own language? How is it that an individual who has as much pride in Canada as I do—his identity as a Canadian is very important—the member opposite, can support not having an amendment in there for CBC's contribution to the development of national unity?

I just feel that this is morally indefensible. It does not speak well for a government that should be supporting a mandate for CBC northern service. Every single job in the north is important. We are in an area with one of the highest unemployment rates. People who train in journalism in the north are very employable. They do an excellent job in the areas that they are employed in.

The majority of those people who get training in the north are aboriginal people. How is it that they can call this a level playing field? How is it that they can justify and morally defend a broadcasting act that basically negates a legislative base for CBC northern service, the use of aboriginal languages and also the development of national unity?

Mr. Scott (Hamilton—Wentworth): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Western Arctic for her very sincerely put question.

I just point out that the last time I looked at this new broadcasting bill, Bill C-40, I saw for the very first time that aboriginal language rights and programming is recognized for the very first time in a broadcasting act.

One of the significant guidelines to the CRTC through Bill C-40 is by way of policy directive through the commission to give absolute priority to aboriginal programming rights, particularly in northern Canada. I think that this itself is testimony to the far greater importance that this Parliament and all future Parliaments must place on aboriginal peoples and programming rights.

I sense a whole new thrust here, through Bill C-40, toward preservation of Canadian programming and nothing could be more Canadian than the aboriginal rights and languages of which the hon. member speaks so eloquently.

I think the parliamentary secretary covered this point very effectively, on the national unity aspect of Bill C-40. Many motions were defeated in the committee to include and incorporate the words "national unity". The phrase was deliberately removed from the CBC's mandate in this bill based on recommendations from the Caplan-Sauvageau Task Force and the Standing Committee on Communications and Culture. Both concurred that the phrase national unity implied a political bias which was inappropriate to a public broadcaster.

Again, let me just assure the hon. member for Western Arctic that the whole purpose of Bill C-40 is to do the very best we can. It is not perfect. Nobody is suggesting that this bill covers all bases and that it cannot be subject to amendment down the road, as a government or the CRTC itself sees fit, but let me just reassure her that the whole thrust of this bill is to preserve and protect a distinctive Canadian cultural identity and that, first and foremost, includes the aboriginal languages and peoples of which the hon. member speaks so proudly and represents so significantly in this House.

Mr. Jim Edwards (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Communications): I put this question to the hon. member for Hamilton—Wentworth whose speech I admired and whose contribution to this whole process I have admired since the days when he was a journalist and, beyond that, to opposition critic and later parliamentary secretary for Communications. I know he still has his ear to the ground and it is a very well tuned ear. Is he aware that not only are there no CBC budget cuts contemplated by the Government of Canada, but that the Government of Canada will be putting some funds into the CBC and that that will be part of the announcement to be made by the President of the CBC tomorrow.

Mr. Scott (Hamilton—Wentworth): I thank the hon. parliamentary secretary for his question. I have been locked into the House of Commons all this afternoon and this evening and, like the parliamentary secretary, any rumoured cuts to the CBC, I believe, should be more appropriately dealt with by the President of the CBC when they hold their formal announcements tomorrow.

I am a fan of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation and I regret, as we all do, cuts when they have to come to this magnificent symbol of national importance and national unity in Canada, but cuts may have to come. They have come and gone over the years, the CBC has still survived and I have no doubt that the Canadian