

Oral Questions

[English]

Mr. George S. Baker (Gander—Grand Falls): Mr. Speaker, 1,100 dedicated, professional people have now found their jobs abruptly terminated. One might say exterminated, so vicious was the manner in which these lay-offs took place.

Is the Minister of Labour aware that employees were told to leave the premises immediately, that some crews who wanted to finish a little bit of editing, to finish their programs, free of charge, were told, "Don't touch a button. Get out".

Will the Minister of Labour investigate this callous and inhumane treatment on the part of the CBC?

[Translation]

Hon. Marcel Masse (Minister of Communications): Mr. Speaker, the CBC is very much aware of any legal implications there might be as result of decisions made by the corporation. I am convinced that these decisions were made after a thorough analysis. If for some reason, a member of Parliament or anyone affected by these cutbacks believes that the CBC erred in its handling of labour relations, there are all kinds of mechanisms for filing complaints, Mr. Speaker.

[English]

Mr. George S. Baker (Gander—Grand Falls): Mr. Speaker, Newfoundland suffered far more than its fair share of this government's cuts. Two of the 11 stations being cut are in Newfoundland, 22.5 per cent of all CBC employees in Newfoundland were laid off.

Will the Minister of Communications tell me how the government can accept the claims of the president and the chairman of the CBC that "The mandate of the corporation can still be served", when in the same sweep they have cancelled regional programs like *Land and Sea* which won the Wilderness Award, which has 53 per cent of the viewing audience? Why axe these programs? Why not axe the chairman and the president of the CBC? That would be money well saved.

• (1500)

[Translation]

Hon. Marcel Masse (Minister of Communications): Mr. Speaker, the decisions made regarding the CBC were based on a number of principles. One of these was

that there should be at least one regional bureau in each province where there were some. The lead writer of the *Globe and Mail* understood the intent of the decision when he wrote, and I quote:

[English]

—the CBC will be no less a national network than it is today. Regional news bureaus will still be in place across the country—

This is true from Vancouver to St. John's.

Mr. Lyle Dean MacWilliam (Okanagan—Shuswap): Mr. Speaker, in a meeting earlier today with the New Democratic Party caucus, the president of the CBC confirmed that the government has been kept fully apprised of the actions of the CBC every step of the way. He said that the political will was lacking to do anything about it. The government has obviously approved and encouraged these cuts, just like it took the broad-axe to VIA Rail.

In the Prime Minister's rush to dismantle and privatize yet another symbol of Canadian identity, has he considered that the resulting ten regional closures may, in fact, be a violation of the CRTC regulations, an abandonment of CBC's requirement for the provision of regional services in Canada?

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

[Translation]

Hon. Marcel Masse (Minister of Communications): First of all, Mr. Speaker, I want to mention, as I said yesterday, that the President of the CBC would have gladly met the members, collectively or individually, and I think that the NDP member's statement confirms that.

Second, I agree with the President of the CBC who said that the corporation and the government consulted each other about their respective objectives and responsibilities.

Third, I would caution against taking for granted what the member just said when he quoted the President of the CBC.

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[English]

PRESENCE IN GALLERY

Mr. Speaker: I wish to draw to members' attention the presence in the gallery of Mr. Vytautas Landsbergis, President of the Republic of Lithuania.