

*Adjournment Debate*

[English]

The English speaking people of Canada feel even more threatened by the Minister's cut-backs and his failure to consult because English Canadians are more vulnerable to American cultural take-over. It is significant that it took an advertisement in *The Globe and Mail* for concerned Canadians to get a hearing from the Minister of Communications (Mr. Masse). It is appalling that Canadians have to take out an advertisement in a newspaper to communicate with the Minister of Communications. Still he lectures rather than listens. When the arts lobby came to Ottawa on March 20 the Prime Minister refused to meet with it.

I do not want to make an unqualified defence of the CBC. Defending the CBC is like hugging a porcupine. Not only is it difficult, but you sometimes wonder why you do it at all. The CBC itself fails to consult. It acts a lot like the Minister of Communications. It is very poor in its treatment of women; its own employees and women in news and public affairs. It spends a lot of time and money fighting its own employees. I think of the case of the—

[Translation]

—Syndicat des employés de production du Québec et de l'Acadie—

[English]

—to name only one. It is top heavy in management and there have not been cut-backs in vice-presidents. Unions which have proposed economy measures have been told to mind their own business.

The CBC's mandate does need reviewing. We should have an open inquiry. We should understand that there are a lot of people who have constructive proposals to make, and they should have an opportunity to make them. The CBC is wasteful, but a major audit of the CBC, the McKinsey report, concluded that in operating in two official languages covering widely dispersed geography, the CBC faced more difficult and costly broadcasting challenges than any other public broadcasters. Yet it is substantially more efficient than other public broadcasters, as measured by hours of programming per employee and per dollar expended. CBC funding has decreased in the last seven years in real terms, but it has produced 300 hours of new programming in that period. Seventy per cent of its budget goes into programming, compared with 40 per cent in private broadcasting. The CBC provides more prime time Canadian television than CTV and Global combined.

● (1815)

The CBC is doing its job. If we replace it with the private sector, we would have less Canadian programming at higher cost. Unfortunately, it does not do enough in prime time in drama and entertainment and needs more money to do so. The audiences are there, as shown when the CBC is able to do a good job and put money into programs. It receives audiences from one million to two million for Canadian shows.

If the Minister had consulted, he would see what the surveys are showing; that people do want more Canadian programming. Features like "Charlie Grants' War" and "Chautauqua Girl!" will be less possible after these cut-backs. There will be less arts coverage and the arts community depends vitally on the CBC. For example, arts directors of theatres cannot travel to see new productions in other parts of the country. They depend on the CBC to be that means of communication. Less of that will happen as a result of the cut-backs.

There have been cuts in parliamentary coverage. Of course, the need to improve drama and increase children's programs will not be met. It is not just the loss of jobs for CBC employees, the independents are hurt as well because they contract with the CBC. Regional centers such as Gander, Labrador City, Moncton, Rimouski, Vancouver and Winnipeg have been badly hit by the cut-backs.

Despite this criticism of the CBC and the mistakes it has made, it produces many good shows and the best television and radio in the country. I am sorry that the equivalent praise cannot be given to the Minister of Communications. The Minister needs to consult the cultural community. He does not know how fortunate he is and how fortunate we are with the quality and dedication of the Canadian cultural community. I hope he will begin the real task of talking with them, meeting with them and reflecting on what they have to say so that he may come forward with a constructive, independent Canadian cultural policy.

**Mr. Geoff Scott (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Communications):** Mr. Speaker, I could spend the next 40 minutes both debating and applauding many of the points raised by the Hon. Member. I think we should note at the outset that the Minister has stated that the promises the Government has made and he has made will be met during our four-year mandate. We are only six or seven months into that mandate.

I share the concern that the Hon. Member for Broadview-Greenwood (Ms. McDonald) expresses when she raises the question of the budgetary reduction in relation to the people who have jobs at the CBC and are concerned about their future. It is for the sake of CBC employees that I deplore the rumours and erroneous reports about alleged decisions having been made which would affect their employment. Given the complexity of the task and the inevitable review as far back as June last year of different options by CBC, any decisions attributed to the CBC would, of course, not be official unless formally announced by the Corporation.

Following the Government's announcement of budget reductions for the CBC and other publicly funded organizations, the Minister expressed the hope that the Corporation could manage the reduction in funding so as to minimize the negative impact on programming. The President of the CBC subsequently announced on December 11, 1984, that the CBC will accomplish the greater part of this reduction through attrition, early retirement and lay-offs. In this regard, the Minister announced in the House his approval of the CBC's request for amendments to its pension plan. The amendments