

Government Orders

I am told that if I live in a province with two CBC outlets, and I think of provinces like Ontario and Quebec, the hon. parliamentary secretary's own province of Alberta, and the province of Saskatchewan, four Canadian provinces which each have two CBC outlets, I am not going to be very comfortable because, from what I understand, there is going to be some kind of rejigging of the operations, a so-called rationalization that will devastate at least one of the operations in each of those four provinces.

As I lead up to my question to the parliamentary secretary, let me say this: I find it to be a cruel irony that, on the very day that the hon. Minister of Communications stands in his place and talks about strengthening the CBC, in a week when this House of Commons is on the verge of passing a broadcasting bill that is there ostensibly to strengthen broadcasting in the country, we are told that the CBC is going to suffer another round of savage cuts. That is an affront to every CBC-loving person in this country and there are millions; it is an affront to this magnificent institution that has made this country so great.

Ever since this government assumed power in 1984, it has made it a national pastime, a habit, that every time it touches one of our treasured national institutions, to demean those institutions, to diminish those institutions.

• (1930)

Do those people opposite find nothing sacred about this country any more? Is there nothing sacred about our institutions? Shame on all of them. Now that I have said that, I want to know: Are all these reports true?

The parliamentary secretary is in the upper echelons of government. I think it behoves him to answer these questions now.

Mr. Edwards: For a moment there, Mr. Speaker, I thought it must be 2.15 in the afternoon and that the hon. member had a rare opportunity to pose a question in Question Period, which is the proper spot for this question to be posed.

However, he raises some serious questions, and I will endeavour to answer them. I think it was significant that he said that the president of the CBC was to make some announcement tomorrow. If the president of the CBC is

making the announcement, obviously he is talking about a CBC decision. I think the CBC, being an arm's length institution which we all want to preserve, should be best positioned—

An hon. member: He is with Treasury Board.

Mr. Edwards: No, he is no longer with the Treasury Board. He is president of the CBC.

I do not feel it is appropriate to comment on some speculative reports that may be on the air, in some newspaper, or wherever the hon. member has heard them.

There was an announcement before the standing committee the other day by the president of the CBC with reference to the parliamentary channel. I believe that what Mr. Veilleux said at that time was in line with recommendations by the Caplan-Sauvageau task force, the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, as well as the Standing Committee on Communications and Culture, and the McGrath committee. They all recommended at one time or another over a period of about five years that a more comprehensive parliamentary service should be provided and that the cost of providing such a service, including distribution, should be borne by the House of Commons. Except for minor changes in the CBC's packaging of the House of Commons service, no action has been taken on those recommendations over the five years.

Apparently, from the announcement that the president of the CBC made, the corporation is willing to continue providing distribution of the House of Commons service, but to do so would require Parliament to pay all costs, the same way it pays for *Hansard*. In today's day and age, it is probably appropriate that it be done that way.

Mrs. Sheila Finestone (Mount Royal): Mr. Speaker, I think it is important for the parliamentary secretary, in light of the fact that he was out of the country, to know that that question was asked in the House yesterday morning. The minister, in response to my question as to whether or not the House of Commons would handle the parliamentary channel through its parliamentary appropriations, made an unequivocal answer. The answer was no.