

*Government Orders*

Let me turn specifically to the CBC, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. I want to say that the CBC is ideally suited to contribute to our goals of national unity. It is suited to developing a shared national consensus and a national identity. It plays an extremely important role in that regard. It is perhaps more difficult to see in central Canada but, speaking as a member who comes from the west, I can say that there are many areas in my province of British Columbia where the CBC is the voice of Canada. It speaks to the people in the hinterlands, in the communities that because of geographic location and what—not simply cannot receive other signals unless they are signals from Tijuana, Mexico or Los Angeles, California. It is the CBC that presents a distinct image of Canadianism from Victoria to St. John's. It is an extremely important function that this organization must fulfil.

This bill does not support that idea. The over-all strategy of this government toward the CBC has been characterized by funding cuts, by neglect of specific initiatives, and by the bifurcation of the management structure of the corporation, by splitting it into two entities, essentially. This legislation puts it clearly on that road.

The government has demonstrated an antipathy for publicly owned enterprises. We have seen this with the privatization of Air Canada, with the privatization of Petro-Canada, and with the move which is well on the way to privatizing our postal service. The government is quick to point out the weaknesses and just as quick to sell those enterprises off to the private sector.

As I speak this evening and talk about the future of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation in Canada, as we talk about the effects of the funding cuts facing the corporation and the impact that this legislation will have on the future of the CBC, I have been notified that the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation has just announced a major lay-off. That spells serious problems for the future of this industry and serious problems for the future of developing that unique Canadian identity. Exactly what the impact of those lay-offs will be, I do not have the details, but that announcement has just come through.

The government is prepared to cut, to privatize, to emasculate, but is it prepared to point to a successful, publicly owned enterprise and perpetuate that enterprise? This legislation, I submit, suggests that it is not.

The main threat to the independence and the integrity of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation is not a commitment to national unity, shared national consciousness and identity, not according to this legislation. The main threat to the CBC is inadequate funding, insufficient commitment to public broadcasting, and essentially an unwillingness to fund innovation through a publicly owned enterprise.

It comes down to the simple ideology of the government that everything in this country must be market driven, that there is no role for the government in terms of a vehicle for national unity if it does not fit with the bottom line structure of the market system. We have seen the result of a market-driven economy in our neighbour to the south. That is what makes Canada a uniquely different country from the United States. Thank God for that.

The CBC will, can and, I would submit, is doing what private enterprise either cannot do or simply will not do and that is its uniqueness. I think the quality of this publicly-owned enterprise is in terms of defining a sense of national unity, a sense of national identity.

I wonder whether this government will cease hindering the corporation as it seems wont to do and actually give it a hand. This legislation drags its feet in a commitment to public broadcasting. The CBC is a national and, I would submit, a nation-building institution. Through first-rate television, radio services and the all news channel, the CBC reflects a Canada that is more than simply the sum of the regions. The sum is greater than the simple addition of all the parts.

The CBC is a buffer against the kind of continentalism that has driven this government's ideological rigidity. In this continentalist view by this government, Canada's destiny lies in a continental bloc led by the United States. To that end our policy on trade, our policy on foreign affairs, our policy on defence have been harmonized with those of the United States in order to fit into this continentalist bloc ideology.