

Canadian Broadcasting Corporation

[Translation]

Mr. Juneau also informed me that he will be meeting the members of the CBC board of directors very shortly and will be ready to announce that the board has decided some time next week.

[English]

Hon. Herb Gray (Windsor West): Mr. Speaker, in giving his statement to the House, the Minister of Communications (Mr. Masse) has told us that there has been an agreement on a plan to help employees of the CBC who will be asked to take early retirement. In doing this, the Minister of Communications has lifted the veil only very slightly on what is going to happen to the CBC and its services for Canadians across this country. He is confirming that there will be substantial layoffs and a permanent loss of jobs for CBC employees. If this is the case, then while he has not lifted the veil further, as I thought he might do, and given us the details of the impact on programming services to Canadians all across this country resulting from the cuts announced in the mini-budget of the minister of Finance (Mr. Wilson) a few weeks ago, I think we can take it for granted, because of what the Minister has said at this time, that there will be substantial reductions in worthwhile programming and broadcasting services available to Canadians throughout this country. Certainly if people are being laid off one has to assume that they will be in the area of programming and news and public affairs. I think we would have to assume that those who will lose their jobs will not be those employed in the head office of the CBC here in Ottawa or in the major regional head offices in Toronto or Montreal. We have to assume that people involved in providing programming services to Canadians in regions like Windsor, Winnipeg and Moncton are going to be among those who will lose their jobs. As a result they will not be able to provide the programming which Canadians in these regions have every right to expect under the legislation passed by this Parliament.

● (1220)

One likely result of the plans of the CBC and the Government, Mr. Speaker, is that Canadians will have to depend on more productions made in other countries and imported into this country. That is a weakening of the essential cultural fabric of this country, something that Canadians have become proud of due to the efforts of the CBC supported by previous Liberal Governments, and which the Conservatives are now beginning to tear apart.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, we are going to have a lot more to say when we get confirmation of what we already have good reason to believe, that the impact of the Conservative Budgetary cuts on the CBC will hurt programming, particularly in news and public affairs, in the outlying regions of this country. We will have a lot more to say when we get these details but we can already conclude that, as with so many other aspects of the Conservative mini-budget, it is damaging a vital national institution. It is damaging the ability of Canadians to receive broadcasting in the areas of news and public affairs and local programming in their own communities. These cuts are

damaging the essential cultural fabric of this country and when the next election comes, this Government, because of the damage it has caused to this country as a whole, not just the CBC, will stand condemned in the eyes and through the votes of the Canadian people.

Mr. David Orlikow (Winnipeg North): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Communications (Mr. Masse) tells the House that the changes in the CBC programming have been done in consultation with the head of the CBC. It is a fine consultation when the Minister holds a gun to the head of the President of the CBC and tells him "We can consult but you have got to cut \$75 million from your budget".

We know from information we have received from various regions that the CBC has proposed and will implement major reductions in the staff and services in most of the regions, including cities like Winnipeg, Vancouver, Windsor, Moncton and Ottawa. We know that not only will people be laid off, but regional and local programming will be severely cut in order to maintain the national programming. We know this kind of major cut will mean that the objective the CBC was given by governments in the past to increase regularly and to a large extent the production and distribution of Canadian programming will have to be cut back.

We say, Mr. Speaker, these cuts will very seriously inhibit the ability of the CBC to provide the kind of service which the people of Canada expect from the CBC. I would hope the Minister would agree that the Standing Committee on Communications and Culture could meet as soon as possible to hear from the President of the CBC so we can get the kind of details which we have not yet received as to actually what kind of cuts there will be and what kind of programming will be so adversely affected.

Mr. Speaker: Questions.

[Translation]

Mr. Gauthier: Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the Minister a question about regional programming.

Can the Minister give this House the assurance that CBC regional programming, and I am thinking of production centres in places like Winnipeg and Western Canada for the French network and English programming in Quebec, will be maintained at the levels we have known in the past two or three years? Is regional programming going to be improved? Will such improvements be continued and can we expect continuation and completion of the five-year plan to promote minorities and bring the CBC to communities with a population of more than 500 people?

Mr. Masse: Mr. Speaker, I can assure the Hon. Member that first of all, during these consultations it was understood that consideration for creative resources both in the regions and in the networks would be given priority. Second, the President of the CBC will be discussing his proposal with the