

Government Orders

I would go back to what I quoted Mr. Spicer as saying, that there will be a slightly shorter leash, but the commission will have much longer teeth. I think that just about says it all.

The hon. member for Mount Royal suggested that the CBC's central position is removed from the broadcasting system. I am sorry that I fail to understand just what she is driving at. The CBC remains the public instrument of broadcasting in the country and whatever one may say about budget allocations and so on, I would point out that the most severe budget cuts ever in the history of the CBC occurred in the year 1982. In fact in real dollar terms since 1984, the CBC budget has been maintained on a slightly increasing basis each year.

Whatever one may say about that, I believe that the CBC's central position in the system is maintained and, in fact, the CBC has recently been showing some rather creative solutions to the problems that beset their system. I believe that once the position of Mr. Patrick Watson is legitimized through the passage of this bill that we will see a flourishing of the CBC. I have great faith in that individual as the chairman designate of the corporation and, indeed, in the president of the company, Mr. Veilleux, as well as in the board itself.

Mr. Speaker, referring to the question of the CBC committees of the board, I know that the hon. member for Mount Royal finds that as problematic as any aspect, including the national unity issue. But I would say to her once more, and I have said it many times, look at it as a creative exercise. Look at it as an opportunity to bridge the two solitudes which I know she and I agree desperately need to be bridged.

Finally, on the question of national unity, we cannot have unity in this country until we have a shared sense of national consciousness and identity. When I made my remark about South Africa—and by the way I have written to the South African ambassador saying that the use of the word totalitarian in describing South Africa is inappropriate because it is a multi-party state—the point that I was making is that a broadcasting system should never be a propaganda instrument of the state or have the least opportunity to be used or have used as such whether it has been or has not been.

I find that there are distinguished broadcasters in this country, including Mr. Spicer, who can give you arguments that this clause ought to be changed and that national unity does not belong in the CBC's mandate. This is based on his experience with Radio-Canada in the 1970s and we must go to basics and have national consciousness and the promotion of that identity as the fundamental basis of the CBC's mandate. Mr. Speaker, I, as an Albertan and as a proud Canadian, am comfortable with that.

Mr. John Harvard (Winnipeg St. James): Mr. Speaker, first of all I want to say how much I appreciated the remarks of the hon. parliamentary secretary. I can say, with deep sincerity, that he is a gentleman to the core and that our dealings with him were always most pleasant. However, we are here to transact some very hard political business.

I have a couple of questions for the hon. parliamentary secretary but, first, I want to deliver to him, if he does not already know, some news. This is news to this House and news to the viewers from coast to coast. The news is this: the CBC is about to be savaged by another round of horrible cuts. As I speak, press reports are circulating that the CBC may undergo, and it will be announced tomorrow, cuts to the tune of \$100 million. I am told by sources that the president of the CBC was on the phone all day, speaking to regional directors across the country. The president will be making a formal announcement tomorrow at a news conference. I am told that perhaps up to 10 CBC regional stations will have to be closed as a result of these savage cuts. According to the CBC's all news channel, some of the other regional stations will be turned into mere store-front operations. That is the magnitude of these cuts that are to be announced tomorrow.

Mr. Nunziata: It is \$200 million, John.

Mr. Harvard: Now I am told by one of my colleagues that it could be \$200 million. One hundred million dollars is horrible, \$200 million is, in my mind, absolutely unthinkable.

According to what I have been told, maybe all of Radio Canada International will be chucked or at least a portion of it will be. I am also told that the CBC is almost bound to get out of the parliamentary service. The parliamentary service may be continued on by the hon. Mr. Speaker, but what I am told is that the CBC will be getting out of the parliamentary service.