

[English]

What the Government is saying, however, is that that kind of information will simply not be available. That kind of discussion will not be available because public servants have been told that it is not appropriate to speculate about policy deliberations or future policy decisions. They must not go beyond the discussion of factual information.

I believe we should interpret what factual information is in light of the comments made earlier by the Minister of Communications. In his view, facts are the kind of information which favours the views of the Government.

When the Minister was asked for facts about the impact of the cuts in the CBC, he would not give that information because it was not desirable. He said it would create dissension, tension and problems because such information would cause anxiety for those involved. His advice is to wait until the information is complete and the decisions are made.

An Hon. Member: Until it is factual.

Mr. Cassidy: I suggest to the Hon. Member that factual information could mean that in a year there might be some evaluation paper which indicates that the decisions taken in October of 1984 had the effect of costing more than 1,000 jobs in Radio Canada, particularly in the regional services across the country. That is factual but is still open to judgment, because the CBC could have made those cuts as a result of a reorientation of its policy. Perhaps only 800 of those jobs resulted from cuts, while 200 jobs may have been the result of a separate policy decision. In other words, "factual" is a matter of judgment.

Facts, as they pertain to government, are substantially relative in nature and a matter of judgment. However, matters of judgment, according to the Government, are not to be speculated on or discussed by public servants.

What will happen? There will be a chilling effect, with no information, or the public and the press will be asked to talk only to the political assistants to the Ministers. Those political assistants will eventually say that they cannot do their jobs because people are constantly calling them. They will cease to return calls and information will be throttled in that way.

Perhaps certain journalists, members of the Opposition or even deputies from the Government will have some of their channels restored, but public servants will always face the risk that they will be told to make a note of who they talk to. They may be questioned about what they said. Although journalists or deputies may not consider a certain matter to be on the record, it might be on the record as far as the Department is concerned. We do not know what consequences that will have.

Eventually, when public servants are deemed to be talking too much or are seen with the wrong people at lunch, they will be brought on the carpet and shown these guidelines. They will be told to shut up and not to do anything that might be deemed to be giving succour to the public or to the press.

In conclusion, the Government is giving a very clear message to public servants that if they want to progress they

Supply

should keep quiet, give as little information as possible and discourage free discussion. The Government does not want to allow the free flow of ideas, which is a concept upon which western society has been based. It frightens me that a government that believes in free enterprise and the free flow of ideas in the commercial sector would want to throttle the free flow of information with respect to its policies.

● (1620)

We in the New Democratic Party think that basic changes in the direction of openness should have been implemented by this new Government in its first three months in office. We all know that once a government is in office for six or nine months, the old ways set in and it is very difficult to go in a new direction.

I happen to think that the statement made by the Joe Clark Government in 1979 was a positive statement that went in the right direction. I wish that that had been repeated rather than superseded by the statement made by Mr. Mulroney just a couple of days ago.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): Order, please.

Mr. Cassidy: I mean the Prime Minister.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): I have already reminded the Hon. Member a couple of times. The Right Hon. gentleman for Yellowhead (Mr. Clark) should be referred to as the Right Hon. Member for Yellowhead. The same refers to the Prime Minister.

Mr. Cassidy: When the Secretary of State for External Affairs (Mr. Clark) was head of the government I thought that government's policy was going in the right direction. I am sorry that that particular precedent has been thrown to the wind.

I would remind members of this House that in Sweden, where there has been a Social Democratic Government for most of the last 50 years, the policy was one of total openness, to the point where correspondence with the ministries is made accessible to journalists, deputies, or whoever wants to look at it along with responses from the ministries. A person can go to any government bureaucracy at nine o'clock and look at correspondence day after day after day. The Swedes have pioneered that kind of openness. It has made for an excellent level of public debate. The Government has not been undermined because different options are being thrown around. People enjoy free discussion. People have the kind of information that has been systematically shut off by our Government over the course of the last few weeks, Mr. Speaker. I point out, in contrast, that when we have sought information about the impact of government measures and cut-backs, that has been consistently denied. Mr. Mulroney said—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): Order, please.

Mr. Cassidy: I beg your pardon, Mr. Speaker. The Prime Minister in August stated that Conservatives believe people have every right to know. He made a promise to that effect.