

*Oral Questions*

in that case is tell the constituent to communicate directly and give the reason why. This is not exactly rocket science.

**An hon. member:** That is right.

**Mr. Manning:** Mr. Speaker, the rules of conduct for ministers and the role of the ethics counsellor are inseparably related. Yesterday in the House the Prime Minister refused to disclose the content of his office's discussions with his own ethics counsellor on the dubious activities of the Minister of Canadian Heritage. This sort of closed room, back door, ad hoc handling of an ethical issue runs contrary to his profession of interest in integrity and openness.

I ask the Deputy Prime Minister directly, what specifically was the advice that the ethics counsellor gave to the government? Did he or did he not say that the Minister of Canadian Heritage should resign?

**Hon. Sheila Copps (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Environment, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I cannot accept the premise of the hon. member that when Jim Hart, MP for Okanagan—Similkameen—Merritt wrote to the minister—

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh.

• (1430)

**The Speaker:** My colleagues, it would be better to refer to one another by our ridings rather than mentioning our names.

**Ms. Copps:** Mr. Speaker, the letter reads: "Dear Minister: A constituent of mine has a concern in regards to pending fee hikes at Regional Cable T.V. Inc. It would be very much appreciated if you"—the minister—"would review the enclosed letters from Mrs. Kirkland and provide explanation as to why she must pay \$3 more per month in basic rates even if she does not want the additional channels".

Presumably the minister in making a reference to the CRTC was passing along the concerns rightfully expressed by a member of Parliament on behalf of his constituents. That is part of the job of being a member of Parliament. We would hope the Reform Party would not want to tie the hands of members who are trying to represent their constituents.

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Suzanne Tremblay (Rimouski—Témiscouata, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, when I listen to the answers of the Deputy Prime Minister, I realize that the Minister of Canadian Heritage is not the only one to confuse the duties of a member of Parliament with the role of a minister.

Can the Deputy Prime Minister tell us what credibility the Minister of Canadian Heritage still has, considering that he is

not even able to understand the responsibilities he has regarding the CRTC?

**Hon. Sheila Copps (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Environment, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister himself said in this House that mistakes were made. Is the hon. member looking for a solution or a political issue?

Last week, the Prime Minister adopted the following solution: he wrote to every minister that no correspondence can be sent directly to quasi-judicial bodies. That solution was arrived at before Mr. Wilson proposed more elaborate rules which will be debated in this House. There was a problem and mistakes were made. These mistakes were corrected and we should respect the integrity of ministers when they are carrying out their duties.

The Leader of the Opposition was a minister at one time. He knows that he had a responsibility to his constituents from Lac-Saint-Jean and also to his position as minister. We would not want his constituents to have their hands tied just because their member of Parliament happened to be in the cabinet. They want to obtain services. We want to provide good, efficient and honest services. And that is what we are trying to do.

**Mrs. Suzanne Tremblay (Rimouski—Témiscouata, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I am not a minister, but last Wednesday evening, when I heard about this issue, I immediately knew that the minister had to resign. That is the real solution.

**Some hon. members:** Hear, hear.

**Mrs. Tremblay:** And if it is not, then this will turn into a political issue.

What kind of credibility can a minister have when he does not understand the basic rules governing his department's operations, and how can he deal with the important issues for which he is responsible, including the financing of the CBC, the future of Telefilm Canada and the National Film Board, the electronic highway, as well as the review of the Copyright Act which we have been waiting for so long?

[*English*]

**Hon. Sheila Copps (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Environment, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has made it very clear that a mistake was made and that the government has put in place a system to ensure it does not happen again. The minister himself made it very clear that as soon as he understood the CRTC was misinterpreting his original letter, he sent a second letter to rectify the issue.

The member says she is going to turn it into a political issue. If the member is really interested in a solution she will recognize the fact that as of last Friday the Prime Minister issued a directive to all members of the cabinet that any letter by any minister to any quasi-judicial body will go through Mr. Wilson.