

Oral Questions

Premiers and discuss Mr. McKenna's resolution as soon as possible. Why will he not agree the time has come for this kind of action?

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, because it is quite obvious this kind of action would be very premature.

It was only this morning that Premier McKenna tabled a complex resolution in the New Brunswick legislature, which has now been sent to other provincial Premiers across Canada and here to the federal Parliament. First of all, all parties must have an opportunity to read the resolution and analyse it very carefully. It will then be up to me to decide whether it would be useful to call a meeting of provincial Premiers and make some progress on this issue.

At this time, such a decision would appear to be premature. Before calling a meeting, I want to make sure we have a very good chance of winning our case. I think we should try and avoid any possibility of an other than favourable outcome as a result of this meeting.

It has happened too often in the past that a major player was hurt as a result of such a meeting, and I would not want this situation to go on indefinitely.

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• (1420)

[English]

COMMUNICATIONS

Mrs. Sheila Finestone (Mount Royal): Mr. Speaker, I believe we would all agree that television is a powerful medium in forming public opinion, expressing cultural values, and defeating the evils of racism. In fact, I would suggest there is no more influential instrument by which to celebrate Canada's diverse identity and to unify Canadians at this critical point in our nation's history.

The Prime Minister has said to his First Ministers that our communication system is the cornerstone for strengthening the unity and the sovereignty of this country.

My question is for the Prime Minister. Why has he allowed his government, in its broadcasting bill, to remove the CBC's mandate to contribute to national

unity? Does the Prime Minister not believe in national unity any more?

Mr. Jim Edwards (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Communications): Mr. Speaker, the government is firmly committed to the concept of national unity. However, I would remind the hon. member that she signed the report of the Standing Committee on Communications and Culture that recommended that the phrase "national unity" be removed from the objectives of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation.

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Edwards: Further to that, Mr. Speaker, I would impress upon her the reality that consciousness and a sense of identity must be there before unity can be achieved. That was the whole idea behind the change in the bill.

Mrs. Sheila Finestone (Mount Royal): Mr. Speaker, as the parliamentary secretary so capably pointed out many times during the course of our deliberations, we did an excellent job but we were far from perfect three years ago. We have made many changes and this country has changed significantly since then. I would remind him that we are in a critical situation and there is a need for national unity at this time.

[Translation]

My supplementary is directed to the Minister of Communications. If our broadcasting system is a public service that is essential to maintaining and enhancing our national identity and sovereignty and if through its programming, the system is to contribute to our sharing a national conscience and identity, isn't the ultimate goal national unity? Why did the minister and his parliamentary secretary remove the national unity clause from the bill. Was it to please the nationalists?

[English]

Mr. Jim Edwards (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Communications): Mr. Speaker, I would remind the hon. member that not only did the standing committee make that recommendation but the Caplan-Sauvageau task force on broadcasting also made that recommendation. It was made in light of a survey of many such mandates for broadcasting organizations around the world. I would point out to the hon. member that such mandates exist in totalitarian regimes such as