

Government Orders

• (2000)

Everyone knows that, when I get up to speak, I say I am from Atlantic Canada. I do that because I am proud of the fact that I am from Atlantic Canada.

There is something wrong here. The news that we have heard—and the rumours are rushing through the halls of Parliament here tonight—is that there are going to be major cuts in regional services to the CBC. I heard out in the lobby, and it is probably good conjecture, that there could be four stations closed down in Atlantic Canada.

I refer back to my colleague's comments about national unity. At the very time that there is a debate going on as to whether or not the country has the wherewithal to stay together, what in the name of goodness is the government trying to perpetrate, when it takes one of the few remaining vestiges of national unity and guts it? What does this mean? It has now used the lever of fiscal control before they brought in Bill C-40? It took the mandate away from the CBC for national unity. Now it is taking the resources away from CBC to perform that very necessary service of trying to represent all of the country.

My hon. colleague also talked about the panels that are being set up because they will be more regionally sensitive. I can tell my hon. colleagues in the Chamber that what I do not need to see on CBC in Atlantic Canada are more shows about Atlantic Canada. Atlantic Canadians need to see CBC shows produced in northern Canada that are run on our national network, the CBC, so that we gain a greater understanding of the problems of the north.

People in western Canada do not necessarily have to become more sensitized to the fact of life of being a western Canadian. What they do need is to produce shows locally in their own stations in some small community where there is a CBC station right now, so that people in Ontario can learn to be tolerant and have a greater understanding of the wonderful diversity that is Canada.

I know that members opposite must be getting calls on this because members on this side are getting calls. I am just absolutely stunned, after the debate that has taken place, that the parliamentary secretary could possibly stand there and say he believes—and I am sure that he does believe—what the Conservatives are doing is in the

best interest of the CBC. What they have effectively done is neutered the CBC as a vehicle for national unity.

When I wake up tomorrow I hope that I do not find out that the comments to which my hon. friend alluded earlier, and the rumours that are bouncing off the walls here, that the CBC, because of the budget cuts which have been forced upon it, is going to be shutting down stations from coast to coast in the country.

I hope that those members opposite, who are in a position to change things because they are the majority in this place, have a good solid reflection of what the government through this policy is doing to the country and to the CBC.

Mr. Edwards: Mr. Speaker, it is marvellous what broadcasters and former broadcasters can do with rumour and, I should add, unfounded rumour.

Ms. Clancy: He's not a broadcaster.

Mr. Edwards: He ought to be one. He is not a humble Liberal.

Very quickly on the question of Conservative participation in debates on this bill, a question raised by my friend from Winnipeg St. James, I should point out that we spent just under 11 hours on clause-by-clause study of the bill. The member was there throughout most of it, if not all of it.

I answered every question that was put to me on behalf of the government. I then found that many of those amendments which I had responded to in full were withdrawn and then reintroduced at report stage. Therefore, I think there has been a very, very full government participation in debate on this bill.

With regard to the question of the national unity issue, I am compelled to quote very briefly from an editorial in *The Toronto Star*—a newspaper which is not generally favourable to this government—which appeared exactly four weeks after the member for Mount Royal's letter was published on the opinion page. I quote: "A decade ago, CBC president Al Johnson ordered CBC journalists to cover the Quebec referendum debate on sovereignty association as a news story and avoid the role of government propagandist. Johnson's fairness order respected a sound journalistic principle and was heeded. But it plainly disregarded the public broadcasters legal mandate to 'contribute to the development of national unity'."