

Government Orders

Last week, when I asked the minister to assure no further cuts to the CBC, he refused to say no. His only words were: "It is with great pleasure that I note the member's suggestion".

We know that when you start to cut, the retirement packages are expensive and difficult to manage. It becomes a rolling stone that cannot stop, which has a wide impact on us all, radio and television, French and English across this land. It is a very serious matter.

For six years the government has been using major budget cuts to force the CBC to focus strictly on programming for mass audiences, to expand its dependence on advertising and to radically cut its regional services. As well, there is the potential jeopardy to the maintenance of the parliamentary channel, to the northern service and to Radio Canada International.

The role of these non-mandated services is important in the spectrum of what we see on the sets that we turn on. This past week we have heard the challenge to their survival. CBC has been so badly wounded, so cut, that in trying to meet its own personal mandate it is going to have to cut services dramatically across this land.

One such service is that of the parliamentary channel, and I would invite the public to let their voices be heard if they want to continue to watch this House discuss and debate the issues of the day. Call for a parliamentary appropriation to ensure the survival of the parliamentary channel. Let the people's voice be heard. This government is mean-spirited. If it thinks that its popularity at 14 per cent can go any lower because their voice is being heard on the channel, that is a pretty sad reason for cutting the parliamentary channel. There are some reasoned debates that go on in this House. I must say from the mute forces across the floor these days, one would presume that they have already decided that the television service of the parliamentary channel is cut out, so they do not have to bother with any form of democracy or multiparty programming responses to the issues of the day.

• (1820)

That is a pretty sad commentary on democracy. When you let it slip, it can slip away. If it does, it is the fault of this government across the floor for its mean-spirited and unparliamentary approach to reasoned and sensible debate. It has not even opened its mind to the arguments that have come to them that are logical and well reasoned. Certainly some of them are.

With the passage of this bill, the CBC will no longer be required to contribute to the development of national unity. It has been dropped from their mandate. The parliamentary secretary loves to say that I voted against including the national unity in this bill. He, like many others on his side, forget to look at society and determine if they have done things inaccurately, incorrectly and be prepared to stand up and say: "I was wrong and we were wrong in that standing committee."

The illusion to this being a propaganda state like South Africa, which was used by the parliamentary secretary, is far from acceptable in this House or as a description of parliamentary democracy or democracy as expressed over the last many years through CBC. I could go on and explain that this was propaganda. There were some things that took place that perhaps should have been cut out of the CBC, the Sault Ste. Marie being an example. But they were not.

Journalistic freedom has grown and is respected in this House and across this land. I think that illusion to propaganda is totally unacceptable, whether it comes from Patrick Watson, Jim Edwards or anyone else. It is an incorrect reading of the right to report and reporters to report. It certainly does not speak highly for respect for leadership across this land.

When Canadians are being pulled in so many directions over trade, the GST, the Constitution, just at a time when the government should be doing everything in its power to give each and every Canadian a sense of belonging and of participation, this is the wrong time to cut out national unity. What better role is there for the CBC as the country's national broadcaster than to help unify Canadians through understanding, through an accessible voice all through this land at this critical point in our history.

The Liberal Party's goal for Canada is developing the national personality, giving access to its expression, building a sense of national identity by giving access and consciousness to that sense. If building access and a sense of national identity and expressing one's personality does not develop a sense of national unity, then what does it do? We believe we need national institutions like the CBC, which is one of the few that are left after they have absolutely sabred most of them across this way, to weave all the regions and all the diverse participants in Canadian society into a unified voice.